

ASPIRATIONS, MOTIVATIONS AND NEEDS OF RUSSIAN FAR EAST INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS  
PURSUING HIGHER EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA ANCHORAGE

By

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## **Abstract**

The United States has always been the top destination for international college students. However, the number of international students attending the United States higher institutions has decreased within the past three years, while the overall number of international students worldwide doubled in the same period of time. New international enrollments have also decreased in Alaska. This qualitative phenomenological study is an attempt to reveal some valuable insights into motivations, challenges and needs of Russian Far East international students who have studied and who are currently enrolled at the University of Alaska Anchorage. Based on the analysis of twenty one surveys and five in-depth interviews, this study provides some insights into factors that informed the decision of international students to pursue higher education in the United States, such as the high quality of education and international recognition of the American diploma, a chance to improve English skills, an opportunity to build international network and to secure potential career abroad, etc. For the American universities, and especially for University of Alaska, this research is an opportunity to better understand the needs of international student community. Also, it can designate areas and potential ways to create a safer and more productive academic environment and increase the international enrollment impacted by shifting social-political environment.

## Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract .....	iii
Table of Contents .....	iv
List of Figures .....	viii
List of Tables .....	ix
List of Appendices .....	x
Acknowledgements .....	xi
Introduction .....	1
Chapter 1: Foreign Student in Alaska. Autoethnography .....	3
1.1 The power of storytelling .....	3
1.2 Arrival .....	3
1.3 A decision-making .....	5
1.4 Back to school.....	6
1.5 A different world: expectations, motivations, and challenges.....	8
1.6 Persistence and community .....	12
Chapter 2: Native Students and International Students.....	14
2.1 Motivations.....	15
2.2 Successful practices .....	15
2.3 Life on the other side (Barnhardt, 1994).....	17

Chapter 3: Rationale and Literature Review .....	19
3.1 Rationale.....	19
3.2 Personal Connections .....	22
3.3 Literature Review.....	23
3.3.1 Globalization of education .....	23
3.3.2 Push-pull theory of migration. ....	24
3.3.3 Politics of mobility .....	26
3.3.4 Motivations .....	31
3.3.5 Culture shock and self-determined motivations.....	32
3.3.6 Stress of acculturation and language barrier.....	34
3.3.7 Cultural Intelligence. ....	36
Chapter 4: Cosmopolitanism and Global Citizenship.....	39
4.1 Global citizenship .....	40
4.2 Cosmopolitanism .....	42
4.3 Cosmopolitanism in Anchorage.....	43
Chapter 5: Research Methodology .....	45
5.1 Research Questions .....	45
5.2 Methodology.....	45
5.3 Sampling.....	47
5.4 Data Coding Process .....	48
Chapter 6: Survey and Interview Results.....	49

6.1 Survey Analysis .....	49
6.1.1 Summary and Reflections of Survey Results .....	67
6.2 Interview Analysis .....	69
6.2.1 Part I: Perspectives of Students .....	69
6.2.1.1 Discrimination .....	70
6.2.1.2 Differences in teaching and learning .....	70
6.2.1.3 Challenges .....	75
6.2.1.4 Self-determined motivations and successful practices .....	77
6.2.1.5 Cultural diplomacy .....	78
6.2.1.6 Applications and suggestions to the UAA administration .....	80
6.2.1.7 Summary .....	83
6.2.2 Part II: Perspectives of UAA Administration and Faculty .....	84
6.2.2.1 General situation .....	84
6.2.2.2 Reasons and consequences of low enrollment .....	84
6.2.2.3 Faculty, staff and resources .....	85
6.2.2.4 Value of IS on campus .....	86
6.2.3.5 Motivations and needs of international students .....	88
6.2.3.6 Support for international students .....	90
6.2.3.7 Summary .....	91
6.3 Limitations .....	93

Chapter 7: Conclusions .....	94
7.1 Implications.....	100
7.2 Future research.....	101
References .....	102
Appendices .....	108

## **List of Figures**

	Page
Figure 1 Push-pull factors based on Lee's Theory of Migration (Lee, 1966).....	25
Figure 2 Global Citizenship in higher education.....	41
Figure 3 Demographics of the study participants from the RFE.....	51
Figure 4 Source of funding when studied at UAA.....	53
Figure 5 Independent students vs. organized exchange group.....	53
Figure 6 Influencing factors to study in the United States.....	54
Figure 7 Sources of learning about UAA.....	55
Figure 8 Influencing factors to study in Alaska, at UAA.....	56
Figure 9 Challenges at UAA.....	57
Figure 10 6-year Baccalaureate graduation rate AY18 at UAA.....	88
Figure 11 Push-pull factors to study at UAA.....	97

## **List of Tables**

	Page
Table 1 Number of IS at UAA.....	21
Table 2 Top 5 countries sending IS to study at UAA.....	21
Table 3 Demographics of IS.....	50
Table 4 Majors pursued at UAA by the survey participants.....	52
Table 5 Helpful practices at UAA.....	58
Table 6 Services needed.....	60
Table 7 Things learned.....	64



## **List of Appendices**

	Page
Appendix A: Letter of Consent and Survey.....	108
Appendix B: In-depth Interview Questions for International Students.....	114
Appendix C: In-depth Interview Questions for the UAA Administration.....	115
Appendix D: IRB Approval.....	116

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## **Introduction**

International education is a complex and profitable enterprise in many developed countries around the globe. Without a doubt, modern education is seen as a key factor in the globalizing world granting access to better standards of living and extensive opportunities for personal and professional growth. Besides its economic benefits and human capital, international education creates a “valuable pool of skilled immigrants for governments” (Migration Policy Institute, 2018, para. 4) wishing to diversify its workforce and to recruit the most talented people with advanced knowledge and skills.

The wide-ranging effects of international education are complex and often politically charged. In this study, I investigate the relative expectations and realities of international students at the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) in the current turbulent social-political national climate. For this purpose, I conducted qualitative research with the Russian Far East (RFE) students with an attempt to reveal some valuable insights into the situation with international education at UAA. It was my intention to give UAA international students (henceforth, IS) an opportunity to share their stories, to express concerns and ideas regarding the overall experience of life as an international student in Alaska. Listening to these stories can help to better address the needs of future foreign enrollees and contribute to success of current IS.

In this study, I am focusing on three major questions:

- 1) What motivates international students from the RFE to pursue their higher education in the United States, at the UAA?
- 2) How do RFE international students describe their experience at the UAA?

3) How can UAA better address the needs and increase the enrolment of RFE international students?

For the University of Alaska, and specifically for UAA, this research is an opportunity to better understand the IS community. Also, it can designate areas and potential ways to create a safer and more productive academic environment. Lastly, as this study focuses on experiences and intrinsic motivations of international students, I wished to amplify the voice of a minority group of students and to create opportunities for UAA's administration to improve campus policies, to deepen understanding of foreign students and other minoritized cultural groups falling into the "trap of generalization" (Croisy, 2014, p. 27).

## Chapter 1

### Foreign Student in Alaska. Autoethnography

#### *1.1 The power of storytelling.*

Legends, myths, sagas, folk tales... Stories are rich, traditional, metaphorical, and expressive. They are the ancient form of connection and passing knowledge on from one human to another. There is an enormous transformative power behind the storytelling. We relate to stories, not to numbers. One single story can shake our consciousness and deepen our understanding of things in a profound way. According to the contemporary communication skills consultant Rob Biesenbach (2018), stories contain six key ingredients that turn them into one of the most powerful tools of human cooperation:

- 1) stories tap into our emotions;
- 2) stories put a face on an issue;
- 3) stories connect us;
- 4) stories humanize us;
- 5) stories raise the stakes;
- 6) stories express themselves through action (Biesenbach, 2018, p. 15-16).

For the purpose of this study, I used the storytelling method to ‘put a face on an issue’ and share my own experience of living in Alaska as a foreign student at UAA.

#### *1.2 Arrival.*

Everyone and everything have a story. This story began eleven years ago, when an eighteen-year-old girl landed in Anchorage International airport. It was April 2008, 5:00 in the morning. The ground behind the airport windows was still covered with snow and the air

outside was fresh and crisp. Many things have changed within the past 36 hours – two oceans were crossed, 12 time zones have shifted, people now were speaking and acting in such an interesting and unusual way. It was like an immersion into some movie that she watched back in Ukraine. She didn't know where to go and decided to wait for her ride at the airport until noon. So, she grabbed her backpack, the only piece of luggage that she owned, went to a coffee stand and pointed at Americano, showing the size (small) with her hands. Of course, it was the famous Starbucks, the very first Starbucks product in her life. Again, just like in a movie! Now it felt complete surreal, and she was happy. A stranger on a strange land. So perfect. This is what she wanted and needed.

The airport was empty, quiet and very authentic. Stuffed wild animals, hanging small aircrafts, Native artwork – all these details reminded that this place is different from what was known before. She picked a cozy spot by the airport window, had a sip of a hot aromatic coffee, and put Loreena McKennitt in her small MP3, a song called *Night Ride Across the Caucasus*. It's a favorite one and so relevant to her state at that moment... A magical play started around 7:00 in the morning when lavender and scarlet colors started flooding the sleeping sky, outlining a vast mountain range. Speechless and motionless she was gazing through the window, eagerly catching every second of this heavenly performance, being afraid to miss any part of it. Mountains that she dreamed about, that she read about, that she has never seen before. They were so close and so astonishing! This is when her entire being was falling into bottomless love with this snowy far away land. This is when she acknowledged that 'it feels right to be here.' So quiet, so simple, so clear. This is where she started writing a new chapter of her life, knowing very little about it.

Of course, that eighteen-year-old girl eleven years ago was me. Sometimes, we look for places and places are looking for us. When we find each other, beautiful things happen. For the purpose of this project, I am going to employ a partial autoethnographic method, one of the forms of qualitative research, along with my mixed-methods approach of survey and long-form interviews. I believe that the autoethnographic method will enable me to describe and analyze (graphy) my personal experience (auto) of being a foreign student at the University of Alaska Anchorage in order to understand cultural experience (ethno) of IS from the RFE (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011, p. 273).

### *1.3 A decision-making.*

As far as I can remember myself, I always loved to study. School has always been my happy place. When I was 14-years-old and was in ninth grade, I wrote a research paper with my Russian literature teacher and defended it at the Minor Academy of Science of Ukraine. Back in 2004, I focused on a Slavic folklore of Kievan Rus, and how native beliefs and perspectives of Slavs have transformed with the advent of Christianity in the tenth century. After the defense of my research, I was offered a fully funded study at the Cherkassy National University. In 2006 I started pursuing my bachelor's degree in Linguistics, focusing on Slavic languages and folklore. At that time, I thought I knew for sure that I will be pursuing my master's degree right after and eventually I will go for a Ph.D. I wasn't sure what exactly I would be focusing on, but the desire to learn and explore was impossible to resist.

This exploration took me far, as far as Alaska, and this is when things have shifted for me a little. After visiting Alaska for three times, and graduating with my degree in Linguistics in 2010, I realized that I really want to be in Alaska more than anywhere else. So,

I decided to try to build my life there and to get a second degree from the American university. The fact that I would have to do it all by myself and to face all risks encouraged me even more. Along with all the beautiful discoveries that new life had to offer, I had to experience the necessity to detour from my academic intentions for a while. It was like learning how to walk again, how to interact with others, how to react to things and how to think in a framework of a new mentality.

#### *1.4 Back to school.*

Though currently I am a student of the University of Alaska Fairbanks, for the purpose of this project, I am going to focus on the time when I was a student at the University of Alaska Anchorage. It is also important to note that I attended UAA as an immigrant student, which is slightly different from IS, however, there are overlaps and commonalities in my experience and experiences of the RFE IS due to our foreign background, similarities in our cultures, and common native tongue.

I tried to start my second bachelor's degree at UAA twice. The first time was in 2013 and the second time in 2015. Back in 2013 I had only registered for one English class just to get a sense of what it's like to attend a college in America and of course to improve my English. I went to the University Center in person trying to get help to enroll and to get answers to my questions regarding degree options and the study process. At that time, I knew no one who was a student at the UAA and who I could talk to about it. So, it all felt like landing on the moon. At the University Center I was kindly invited to talk to a general advisor who briefly went over the paperwork that I needed to submit, gave me a brochure with degrees that UAA was offering and a list of resources where I could look for classes and



register. It sounded like everything that I needed could be found online and I didn't really have to appear in person. I had been told if I have a question in a future, I could search for it on the university's website or just send an email. These made sense, sort of. After I came back home, I tried to register for a basic English class that I was interested in. Soon after I found out that I was not allowed to register for it because I didn't meet the prerequisites (what are prerequisites?). In despair I started digging in and it appeared that in order to take the class I wanted, I had to take 4 other classes that go back to a high school... That wasn't encouraging by any means. I wasn't thrown back by the number of classes, but the realization that I will be the one paying for every extra academic hour was devastating. I did not have anyone who could support me while I was at school, and I had to rely on myself. Maybe I should wait until my English is better? Maybe I should wait until my financial situation is more stable? Maybe I will never obtain a degree from the American university and I just have to find some other ways to contribute to this world?

The next two years I spent working for a big tour company and travelling around the world. These couple of years were happy years that opened up new horizons and brought some realizations. However, the sense of incompleteness was still there. It felt like I tried to turn away and distract myself, just to stay busy with other things while the true dream patiently waited to be embodied. The dream of going back to school, to reveal some talents, and to implement my interests and beliefs in a way that could benefit others.

Going back to school is a big decision for anyone, I have no doubt in that. But for a foreigner it is like immersing into unknown within the unknowns – it is like trying to find a balance in a midst of turbulence. Your self-confidence is being tested three times more that it

was back at home university. After months and years of questioning myself, early in the spring of 2015, I made a decision. At that time, my English was good enough to communicate with others and to read newspapers, but I was well aware that it was quite far away from perfection and comprehension of the academic literature. My accent was still there, and I didn't see it going away anytime soon, if ever. Finally, my financial situation was still leaving me with the hope for the best. But what had changed was my intention. I decided that I was going to apply all my skills and resources, risk it, start the school and see what happens. I started researching on how to obtain my transcripts from the Ukrainian university and how to make them count here, in the United States. I was reaching out to the World Education Services (WES), Ukrainian Ministry of Education, and my home university. I was collecting letters of recommendation, seals, translations, and evaluations. Though every step was quite time-consuming, I was happy to see this ball rolling and things started to progress slowly. In about six months I had all the paperwork I needed to go back to the UAA and to meet prerequisites and general education requirements. By that time, I decided that I wanted to pursue my second bachelor's degree in International Studies with the focus on European Region. There was nothing else holding me back. I started UAA in the fall of 2015 and registered for a full load of classes. I was working two jobs at nights and on weekends. One job meant to pay for my living expenses and the other job was to pay my tuition cost. It was very intense but very interesting time.

### *1.5 A different world: expectations, motivations, and challenges.*

Today, collecting data from other foreign students and trying to determine their motivations, challenges, and needs at UAA, I am looking back and asking myself the same questions. What was my motivation to pursue a degree from the UAA? My initial motivation

to get a higher degree was pretty strong. Luckily, I didn't have to look for reasons why I should or shouldn't go back to school. While I clearly saw the benefits and potentials of getting a college degree in the United States, the driven motivation was an internal curiosity and love for academic environment. In the United States, it seemed to be exceptionally liberal and offered unlimited possibilities around the world. I really liked that in the American school system students are able to construct their own schedule and choose classes of their own interest, expand the scope of personal interests by participating in various internships and take advantage of learning opportunities. There was a great sense of independency and confidence in a future.

Why did I choose the UAA? First of all, I was already living in Alaska, and second, after doing some research, I quickly became aware that the tuition cost was significantly lower at the UAA than in other places. I should say that tuition cost was one of the major obstacles for me on my pathway to American college. I knew about federal loans and opportunities to apply for scholarships and grants. While I applied for a few scholarships (unsuccessfully, I should say), I decided to stay away from student loans and pay as I go, taking as many classes as I could afford by all meanings. Ultimately, I am so grateful for making such decision that allowed me to graduate debt free.

What challenges have I experienced while I studied at UAA? Very soon after starting my new college journey, I found out that teaching and learning styles were quite different than what I used to back at my home university. Besides questions related to school subjects, I had questions that puzzled my confidence and faith that I could succeed in this new environment. "Are they going to think that I am not smart enough if I say this?" "Am I going to say it wrong because of my English and everyone will judge me silently?" "If I don't say

this, will they think that I just don't understand the material or that I am not interested in participation?" "Is it appropriate to ask a professor so many questions after he/she went over the details and everyone seem to understand the task?" These and many other hesitations were circulating in my mind constantly. A line of language barrier, sense of awkwardness and social expectations was laying between me and new school. It became thinner as I adapted to a new environment, but it didn't disappear completely until this day.

Student-professor relationships were also different than I was used to. I don't want to say if they were better or worse, they just were different and well reflected the values of both societies. Back at home, I felt like professors had more control over their students. Part of their job was to teach, to give material, to make you succeed, and they would do it with or without your will. Basically, a student had to choose either he or she goes to school and works hard for every grade or leaves. I remember waiting in long lines by a professor's office in order to retake an assignment or to have a consultation. Very often, professors were staying way past their office hours till late night, until the last student was seen. That was exhausting, but I think many of us actually learned the material while waiting in those lines. At UAA I felt like students were treated with respect, like adults, like business partners. Everyone knew their rights and responsibilities and things were quite predictable according to the school protocol. Professors were there to help and to guide, to offer options, while the ultimate decision was by the student. There was a sense of independence and personal responsibility. No one would push you if you choose not to do something. In my view, this difference reflects socio-cultural values of these two countries. Ukrainian university and society in general are still impacted by the socialism. There is no such thing as 'out of class - out of mind' for professors. For this reason, many students find themselves in a situation of

being ‘babysitted’ by their professors. While here, in the United States, the notion of individual responsibility and a single person’s dignity is a common practice.

I wouldn’t say it was hard to comprehend these new requirements and to adapt, though it certainly took some time. At first, I felt disconnected and isolated from the college life. I was attending all classes and submitting all my papers in a timely manner, so there were no issues. But I didn't feel like I belong to this college community. It seemed like everyone knew what they are doing and knew exactly why they are there. Many people already had their families and school was a dedicated side project for them. Back at home we spent significantly more time at school, working on more group projects and had more opportunities to interact with each other and our professors. At my new school I had to make sense of things for myself. Complete freedom. There was no one to tell you what classes or events I should attend, in what projects to participate. Also, at UAA I realized that there is no set schedule for classes that we used to have back in Ukraine. Back at my home university, there schedule was created for us and professors by school administration and we all had to follow it. Every day, Monday through Friday we would have 3 to 5 classes. Here, students have control over the number of classes that they want to take and the time when they’d like to take them. This policy allowed me to have more flexibility and control over my own schedule. I could work and go to school without conflict between two. While it was quite stressful and frustrating in the beginning, and I wish I had someone explaining these norms, options, and expectations to me to ease my transition, by the end of my first year at UAA things became a little more clear.

### *1.6 Persistence and community.*

What helped me to adapt? First of all, personal persistence. This is the main driving gear. You just have to keep going like there is no way back. Second, the social support, the community. By the end of my second semester at UAA I have meet a few Russian speaking students on campus. We quickly became friends, and I felt less disconnected from the campus life. Our problems and experiences were very similar, as well as our reasons to be frustrated or feel lost. I cannot imagine my American college life without these international students now. We became close friends and keep in touch even after we have graduated. When you can speak your native language after carefully choosing English words and constantly thinking how to build a sentence, being able to speak the native language is like swimming in an ocean, freely and happily. It is an excellent way to get some stress relief and just express ourselves honestly and fully. It was amazing to be able to laugh at each other's jokes and to watch movies in Russian together, celebrate holidays and cook traditional meals just like back at home. It made things so much brighter and so much easier for me. I can see the difference in my college experience with and without this community of IS. It is so crucial for foreigners to have that safe island of something well-known and familiar. Someone might argue that IS come to another country to get a foreign experience, and develop a foreign network, not simply create a little bubble of native speakers. But I can certainly say based on my experience, that having a community where you feel safe where you can go back to and be yourself, strengthened my capacity to communicate with my American peers and to expand my friendships with local students. I became more confident, more relaxed and I was able to happily manage my school, work, and fun time. In May 2017, I graduated from UAA with B.A. in International Studies, Philosophy minor and with an excellent GPA.

Today, looking back, I am grateful to the UAA and I care for its future. My current study is an attempt to conduct an analysis, to raise some constructive concerns, and to enable other IS to express their experiences of living this different life full of discoveries, challenges, and opportunities. Afterall, knowing the role of community in my personal success, I really wish every IS to be able to find their own community on campus. In my view, current situation with IS at the UAA, when we see the number of IS significantly dropping, reduces these chances and limits opportunities for IS to create a healthy environment and ultimately succeed. While I realize that today UAA and the University of Alaska System as a whole are going through some tough times due to budget cuts, I truly believe that the internationalization of the university can bring additional resources to improve the current situation.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Native Students and International Students**

The University of Alaska Anchorage serves over 2,000 Alaska Natives, American Indian, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students and graduates over 250 Native students each year in over 25 degree programs. In 2018, UAA had 2,350 Alaska Native students enrolled to various programs and degrees, from certificate/licensure to doctorate level (UAA, Alaska Native Facts, 2019a). Though in this study I focused on RFE IS studying at UAA, in the course of my research, there were noted some commonalities in experiences and needs of IS and Native students. It appears that minority student groups despite their ethnic, cultural, and linguistic differences, share many similarities when it comes to adaptation and thriving in a new environment. Native students arriving to Anchorage from remote villages to pursue their degrees, face similar challenges like IS. For Native students, living conditions, academic and the social environment in Anchorage are significantly different compared to life in rural areas. Just like IS, Native students experience family and community separation, linguistic and cultural barriers and a sense of not fitting in into campus life.

In this chapter, I would like to take a brief look at Native college students. What informs the decision of Native students to pursue higher education and to move to a big city? What challenges do they face when trying to adapt to a new urban and college environment? What helps them to overcome social and academic obstacles and to succeed? To provide a laconic outline of these questions, we are going to review a few studies focusing on Native students in the context of higher education.



## *2.1 Motivations.*

It appears that motivations of rural Alaska Native youth are informed by factors quite different from youth in urban Alaska. Due to the extreme isolation of some rural communities in Alaska, very few sources of paid employment are available. It is an especially significant problem for Alaska Native youth aged 20 to 24 since this group has the highest rate of unemployment among working age Alaska Native population. In one study titled *Educational Aspirations/Attainment Gap* (Doyle, Kleinfeld & Reyes, 2009), the authors employed a qualitative interview method to collect data from Alaska Native rural students at the end of their high school year. 49 students were asked about their plans, interest and motivations to attend postsecondary programs. Most rural students (61%) had high educational aspirations and said that they want to go to vocational school or college. At the same time, many students expressed some doubt and fear of leaving their village for college. Among major obstacles were 1) low quality of education in a village (many students felt unprepared to meet college requirements); 2) complicated enrollment and paperwork process, lack of guidance on how to go about attaining their educational aspirations; 3) lack of adequate support on behalf of school counselors and administration; 4) sense of being caught between desire to go to college (to a city) and desire to stay in the village: “I don’t want to go to the city, but I want to. I want to further my education... In the village is a lot better than staying in the city” (Doyle, Kleinfeld & Reyes, 2009, p. 28-30).

## *2.2 Successful practices.*

Another study *Home Away from Home* (Tachine, Cabrera & Bird, 2017) also focused on factors that influenced Native students’ decision to pursue higher education and factors that helped them to succeed in their academic career. The study determined that the

economic context becomes a basis for educational aspirations. This research employed sharing circles methodology and revealed a number of factors that challenged and negatively impacted 1<sup>st</sup> year in college Native students' experience at Southwest University (pseudonym), such as social isolation, disconnection from the home culture and family, financial burdens, sense of unacknowledgement, prejudices, and microaggression on campus. Despite attempts of student affairs practitioners to engage 1<sup>st</sup> year Native students to traditional social activities on campus, it appeared that isolation "has a different cultural meaning for Native students due to their relationship to place/land and others" (Tachine, Cabrera & Bird, 2017, p. 794).

Native identity goes further than the home and local community; it also includes relationships with a natural environment, relationships with a Native place. Clearly, Native students became separated not only with their families and communities but with their natural surroundings, which became another stress factor influencing Native students' adaptation on a campus ground. Additionally, many Native students stated that during their time in college they encountered hidden prejudices and invalidation based on their cultural heritage and on what other students constituted as "being Native" (e.g., "you don't sound like a Native," "you don't look like a Native"). (Tachine, Cabrera & Bird, 2017, p. 795). The Native identity of these students was "in conflict with the dominant White culture of the institution" (Tachine, Cabrera & Bird, 2017, p. 800). At the same time, despite all these challenges, the sharing circles method revealed some valuable factors that contributed to Indigenous students sense of belonging and ultimate success in their social and academic life. The study showed that establishment of a Native Cultural Center on campus became very helpful for many Native students. Students described it as a space where they could "be themselves," where they have

experienced a “homelike” environment, had an opportunity to share language and understand each other’s jokes. Additionally, at the Native Center, students had an opportunity to determine to whom they were related through their tribe’s clans which brought them even closer to each other created a sense of ‘home away from home.’ As one Native student shared: “[Native Center] is where all the Natives hang out and that’s where everything got easier. I could be myself there. I could laugh and joke around like how I would be at home so [Native Center] really helped me to transition” (Tachine, Cabrera, & Bird, 2017, p. 798).

### *2.3 Life on the other side (Barnhardt, 1994).*

Several similar studies have been conducted here in Alaska. Dr. Carol Barnhardt from the University of Alaska Fairbanks (henceforth, UAF) in her doctoral dissertation *Life on the Other Side* (Barnhardt, 1994) examined conditions that contributed to the success of Alaska Native students at the UAF between 1989 and 1993. In her study, Dr. Barnhardt used student university records to analyze a data of 50 Indigenous students. Additionally, the researcher used an ethnographic interview method to learn more about the personal experience of 20 Yup’ik students (Barnhardt, 1994, p. 58).

These minority groups (international and Native students) are very similar in a sense of living a “life on the other side.” Many Indigenous students stated that they had to work extra hard to be academically successful and they felt their efforts and achievements were “reviewed more critically” due to their minority background (Barnhardt, 1994, p. 249). In the course of this study, Dr. Barnhardt was able to identify and outline some valuable factors that boosted academic and social success for Alaska Native students on the UAF campus. Among the major factors are:

- A responsive and relevant teaching and learning environment that served the interest and needs of culturally diverse students;
- Better connection with faculty members who truly cared to know students as individuals;
- Effective student support services, inclusion of more informal academic-related events, such as Elders' potlucks, dance groups, etc.);
- Opportunities for students to work for the university in the jobs that were related to their major;
- Institutional recognition of individual effort to immerse in a foreign situation and often being the first member of their family or community to attend college (Barnhardt, 1994, p. 231-233).

Therefore, in our attempt to better understand and address the needs of IS arriving to Alaska, we should also pay close attention to the inner migration occurring within our state. Alaska is a unique place that requires special approach to adaptation. Experiences of Native students moving from rural areas to a city for college can reveal for us some of the best adaptation practices and ways to cope with social and academic challenges. Understanding of these experiences not only helps to better interpret the needs of ethnic minorities and improve college completion rates, but it also aids in self-determination, promotes sense of belonging, support, and fosters the “betterment of the first peoples of what is now America” (Tachine, Cabrera, & Bird, 2017, p. 802). Factors that contributed to Native students’ success, outlined by scholars working with Indigenous populations, should be carefully examined by officials working with IS and repurposed when applicable.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Rationale and Literature Review**

In this chapter I aim to outline a rationale for my research, demonstrate some personal connections to the topic, and provide relevant literature that guided my work. Current research comes from the field of cross-cultural studies and looks at international education through the lens of globalization, contemporary economic development, politics, cosmopolitanism, and cultural diplomacy.

#### **3.1 Rationale**

According to the *Open Doors Report* (2018) and data provided by the Institute of International Education (2017) and the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (2018), since 1990 the number of IS in the United States more than doubled, from 408,000 to a new high of 1,094,792 in 2018. IS that attend American universities not only contribute to the intellectual capacity of this country, but they also yield "an estimated economic impact of \$36.9 billion" and support around 450,000 U.S. jobs (American Council on Education, 2018, para. 6). This data is evidence of a high impact of IS on the U.S. higher education system and the U.S. economy.

Historically, the United States has always had a reputation for "world-class education facilities; diverse student populations, leadership innovation, research and development" (Bowman, 2018, p. 20). According to the Migration Policy Institute (2018), the United States hosted about 1.1 million of the 4.6 million IS enrolled worldwide in 2017. The next two top destinations were the United Kingdom, hosting 11% of IS, and China, hosting 10% of IS (Zong & Batalova, 2018). The increase of international recruitment is a result of globalization,

as more and more students seek higher education programs taught in English. Such internationalization of the student body not only creates a positive image of a university but, on a larger scale, it also contributes to the U.S. economy, diversity, and social consciousness. It also deepens cultural relationships and strengthens collaboration between countries and often become a point of contact between nations that are in political disagreement. There is a strong evidence that international students' intellectual contributions are felt in American research, technology and social science disciplines (Leong, 2015).

However, in recent years the share of globally mobile students in the United States has dropped from 28% in 2001 to 24% in 2017, while the overall number of IS worldwide more than doubled in the same period of time (Zong & Batalova, 2018). Additionally, despite various newly founded campaigns such as #YouAreWelcomeHere (2018) striving to increase access to the U.S. higher education for talented IS and to promote institutions' diversity, a total of 291,000 new international students enrolled at U.S. institutions in 2016–2017, which is about 10,000 fewer than in 2015–2016 (Zong & Batalova, 2018).

So why are fewer IS going to the United States to study? With the U.S. international policy shifts after recent Presidential elections and public debates on immigration and foreign presence in the country, there are many questions rising regarding the United States' ability to continue attracting, educating, providing a safe and supportive environment, and meeting and expectations of the brightest talents from around the world (Bowman, 2018). The U.S. higher education institutions reporting that current social and political environment raises a big challenge for international recruitment and students from foreign countries are facing more restrictions on visas with the Trump administration's immigration policy (Redden, 2018).

Besides legal and financial challenges, many international students experience emotional discomfort associated with social integration into a new environment that “requires emotional and cultural intelligence” (Thompson, 2018, p. 1220).

The *Open Door Report* (2018) showed that new enrollments of IS in the United States nationwide decreased by 6.6% in the academic year 2017-2018 compared to the previous year. In 2018, the state of Alaska hosted 414 international students. UAA remains to be an institution with the highest number of IS in the state. However, the number of IS enrolled at UAA has decreased over the past 5 years (please see Table 1). Canada appears to be the top sending country composing roughly 13.7% of all IS at UAA (please see Table 2).

Table 1: Number of IS at UAA (UAA Fact Book, 2018)

Year	Number of IS at UAA
2017	209
2016	286
2015	281
2014	269
2013	315

Table 2: Top 5 countries sending IS to study at UAA (Open Doors, 2018)

Country	% of IS at UAA
Canada	13.7%
India	10.3%
South Korea	8.1%
Japan	6.6%
Russia	6.4%

While there are numerous studies presented in the literature review section on how and why IS decide to study in the United States, there were no studies found on IS' experiences at the University of Alaska Anchorage.

### **3.2 Personal Connection**

Although I am no longer an IS, I do have first-hand experience of studying abroad and being immersed into another culture. Initially, I came to the United States as an exchange student while I was pursuing my bachelor's degree in Linguistics in the Ukraine. In 2017, I received my second bachelor's degree from the UAA (B.A. in International Studies and Philosophy); therefore, I am also familiar with UAA campus life. Additionally, I currently reside in Anchorage, Alaska and have direct access to most of my participants and the UAA school administration. I chose to focus on this topic due to my initial great interest in getting education overseas and passion for multicultural affairs, my personal experiences of living as an IS, and later, working with IS from the Russian Far East and building friendships with many of them here in Alaska.

In 2018-2019 I had a chance to do my internship with the U.S Consulate General in Vladivostok, Russia, Public Affairs Section (U.S. Embassy & Consulates in Russia, 2019) and to work closely with EducationUSA, a U.S. Department of State network of international students, advising center in Vladivostok (EducationUSA Russia, 2019). In February of 2019, I worked on representing the University of Alaska Anchorage on the Education Fair in Vladivostok, Russia. Due to this experience, I became well aware that as of today, the U.S. Department of State is actively looking for ways to increase the number of Russian students studying in Alaska, and to promote an increase in student and faculty exchanges between



Alaska and the Russian Far East. I am greatly motivated by knowing that this study along with other studies focusing on international collaboration through education are needed and can be applied both locally at the University of Alaska and internationally, in Russia, to better understand IS' perspectives and to straighten the academic exchange between the United States and Russia.

### **3.3 Literature Review**

In this section, I connect my study to the relevant peer-reviewed literature that has guided my work. My research comes from the field of international education and focuses on defining and understanding of challenges, motivations, and needs of IS in the United States and around the world. I have also drawn on literature from the field of educational psychology and global development, which has deepened my comprehension of interconnectedness of things in the era of globalization and showed me a complexity of the topic.

#### *3.3.1 Globalization of education.*

The globalization of the world economy, politics and education naturally leads to an increase of international students all around the world. Academic migration has a number of positive aspects. It helps to establish and to effective international contacts with the scientific and business communities overseas, it enhances student and faculty exchanges which is an important precondition for the science without borders, and it helps to form ethnic diasporas around the world (Korobkov & Zaionchkovskaia, 2012). Due to these factors, by 2025, student mobility is likely to reach 8 million students per year (OECD, 2016). Based on these numbers, leading universities start seeking to form international knowledge networks characterized as

‘brain circulation’ in order to better transfer and synthesize knowledge from receiving to sending countries (Gesing & Glass, 2019).

However, while globalization opens doors across the globe and invites students to move freely, it also leads to mass intellectual migration from the developing to developed countries. This means that students and scholars emigrate from their home countries to a country of destination on a temporary or permanent basis (Batalova, Hooker, & Capps, 2014). Very often, globalization forces developing countries to face a ‘brain-drain’ problem. For instance, the intellectual migration from Russia accounts for up to 12% of the world’s research personnel (with the highest demand for physicists, biologists, chemists, and mathematicians), and more than half of international students from the Russian Federation, who graduated from the American universities, remained in the U.S. permanently (Korobkov & Zaionchkovskaia, 2012). Understanding students’ motivations and needs in a globalizing world is critical for policy makers and recruiting university across the globe, because it helps to predict and to better interpret the migration tendencies and to prevent a loss of human capital.

### *3.3.2 Push-pull theory of migration.*

Dr. Lee (1966) from the University of Pennsylvania proposed a comprehensive theory of human migration back in 1966 where he described places as entities possessing a set of positive and negative factors influencing human decision to stay or to migrate. For instance, areas with good climate tend to attract more people than bad climate. However, it is important to note that “push-pull factors differ from person to person and may change over time” (please see Figure 1) (Lee, 1966, p.50).



Figure 1: Push-pull factors based on Lee's Theory of Migration (Lee, 1966, p. 50)

In the context of international education, the 'push-pull' theory is being described as student migration due to somewhat negative factors in the home country ('push' factors) and attractive factors in another country ('pull' factors) (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Among 'pull' factors are quality of foreign education, research opportunities, intention to immigrate upon graduation, political climate, attractiveness of foreign diploma, improvement of foreign language skills, desire to live in another country and better understand other cultures. 'Pull' factors gain even bigger importance in the "expansion of the U.S. academic and economic potential, and thus an essential component of American 'soft power'" (Korobkov & Zaionchkovskaia, 2012, p. 329). On one hand, economic uncertainties upon graduation, undeveloped professional areas in a home country, desire to bring knowledge back home, limited opportunities to practice a foreign language, are often viewed as 'push' factors by students from developing countries (Figure 1). On the other hand, 'push' factors for students from developed countries, such as the USA, are different. Most of these students are driven by cultural reasons, such as desire to travel the world, to learn more about other cultures, or to

learn or improve foreign language skills due to extensive opportunities back in the states (Batalova, Hooker, & Capps, 2014).

It is important to note that both ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors are not the same for everyone. On an individual level, these factors can change depending on gender, age, education, social class, ethnicity, spiritual beliefs, physical ability, etc. On an international level, push and pull factors between countries can also change over time due to a change in government policy, changes of co-national networks or employment schemes (European University Institute, 2017). For instance, in a multi-cultural study of STEM international students’ mobility (Gesing, & Glass, 2019), researchers used survey methods to examine political, economic and social factors influencing graduate student’s mobility and intent to stay or to leave the USA upon graduation. Results of the study suggested that while economic incentives and career development opportunities influence the intent of graduate students to stay in the U.S. (pull-factors), the recent socio-political environment in American society increasingly influences students’ intent to return to their home country. Therefore, the ‘push-pull’ framework is more complex than it appears at the first. It requires individual evaluation, analysis, and understanding in order to interpret and predict human migration accurately.

### *3.3.3 Politics of mobility.*

We are living in an increasingly mobile world. The globalization as cultural, political, technological, and economical process is impossible without international migration. People are motivated by a variety of reasons to travel over extensive distances across the globe. Education is one of the driven reasons. It appears that there is a relationship between socio-economic, cultural, academic and political reasons influencing students’ decision to study

abroad.

Throughout recent history, there were multiple attempts to recover and reestablish productive relationships between the United States and Russia and to advance academic mobility. On November 21, 1985, the U.S. Secretary of State Shultz and Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze signed a new General Exchanges Agreement marking the resumption of academic and cultural exchanges between these countries (U.S.-Soviet Exchange Initiative, 1989). According to this document, the United States and Soviet countries agreed:

- to expand its graduate, postgraduate and research exchanges;
- to place over 500 American students studying Russian in long-term study abroad programs hosted by major Soviet institutes in Moscow and Leningrad;
- to place 200 Soviet undergraduate graduate students and teachers at the U.S. universities;
- to enhance summer exchange of high school teachers of English and Russian;
- to continue exchange of university lecturers under the Fulbright program;
- to expand exchange of high school teachers: send ten American teachers teach in Soviet schools to teach English and ten Soviet high school teachers to teach Russian in America (U.S.-Soviet Exchange Initiative, 1989, p. 6-7).

Later, in 1992, the administration of President George H. W. Bush and congressional Democrats designed a Freedom Support Act to help the democratization in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Soviet Union (Carcelli, 2017). In regard to education, the Freedom Support Act (1992) aimed:

- to finance an educational, cultural, and business exchange programs with independent states of the former Soviet Union and Baltic States;
- to authorize support for educational television in a region;
- to support production of educational books for children and adults of the former Soviet Union;
- to enhance resources of existing U.S. educational facilities in Europe;
- to expand international military education and training;
- to promote drug education, interdiction and eradication programs;
- to secure grants for the non-profit civic organizations working towards democratization of a civil society (Freedom Support Act, 1992).

In the research focusing on mobility of students from post-Soviet Eurasia, Chankseliani (2018) showed possible links between student migration and the democratic transition of students' home countries. The data showed that historically, students chose to study in Europe and the United States due to "higher levels of attained democracy" in these countries compared to their home and neighborhood states (Chankseliani, 2018, p. 286).

While the United States remains to be among the top ten desired destinations for IS, recent international policy shifts have a direct impact on foreign presence in the country. As of today, the topic of migration and immigration policy remains to be a subject of heated debates in the United States and around the world. Despite a long history of immigration and the fact that more than a million of immigrants arrive to this country each year composing 80 percent of total population growth, the United States is struggling with comprehending and properly addressing the needs of immigrants (Center for Immigration Studies, 2018).

There are numerous restrictions holding international students from enrolling in the U.S. institutions, such as the cost of coming to the United States and the growing capacity of higher education systems around the world. Many international students planning to pursue higher education in the United States face denial, delays and significant complications with their student visas, at the time when U.S. colleges depend on international students as a valuable source of diversity and tuition (Maduro, 2018). According to the U.S. State Department, in the past decade, overall visa issuance to foreign students and exchange visitors exceeded 1 million in the 2015 fiscal year, but it declined about 20% in the past two years, to roughly 814,000 in 2017 (U.S. Department of State, 2018). The data provided by the Institute of International Education (2017) in partnership with the U.S. State Department showed that about 83% of surveyed colleges said that visa delays and denials were factors in driving enrollment down, followed by social and political environment in the U.S. overall at 62% (Open Doors, 2018).

The 2016 U.S. elections have further raised the issue in political and public debates, and today, more than ever before, the topic of immigration is tied to the national economy, security, and U.S. humanitarian values at a time of highest human displacement on record (Zong, Batalova, & Hallock, 2018). In this context, further research is needed to expand our understanding of the direct link between the democratic socialization of a country, international development, and education without borders.

In January 2017, President Trump's administration issued a first travel ban, also known as "Muslim ban," that placed 90 days restrictions on entry to the United States individuals from Iraq, Libya, Sudan, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, and Iran. Among those who were affected by the ban were scholars and international students intended to come to study at the U.S.

universities. Many universities across the United States felt the direct impact of the travel ban. For example, at places like Arizona State University (Tempe, AZ) and Bennington College (Bennington, VT), IS comprised nearly 20% of all student population (Open Doors, 2016). Due to travel restrictions, some of these students were prevented from continuing their studies and some became unable to attend the U.S. college at all. The President of Bennington College, who is a Japanese-American female, stated that the travel ban is a “serious damage to America” since it damages the nation’s ability to educate future leaders of a democratic society (Silver, 2018, para. 6).

Academic communities worldwide as well as national U.S. universities and education organizations demonstrated solidarity and filed a joint law-suits against the Trump’s administration and called to action against the “predictable loss of some talented and skilled scholars” and foreign students (Mattias, 2017, p. 897). Similarly, while recognizing the importance of security procedures, the American Council on Education (2018) stated that such demeanor sends a global message that “America’s doors are no longer open to foreign students, scholars, lecturers, and researchers” and the free flow of ideas and people are “critical to progress in a democratic society” (para. 5). The travel ban put at risk all the benefits that could be gained by America from hosting graduate and undergraduate IS and scholars. Historically, IS have been investing substantial resources into U.S. higher education with an expectation to be able to get some work experience in the United States upon graduation. However, the travel ban and urge to “Buy American, Hire American” “has called these opportunities into question” (Pottie-Sherman, 2018, p. 33). Additionally, on January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020, President Trump’s administration issued a new proclamation adding six other countries to the travel ban list. Among these countries are Nigeria, Myanmar (Burma), Eritrea, Sudan,



Tanzania, and the former Soviet republic Kyrgyzstan (Kanno-Youngs, 2020). Citizens of these countries are no longer able to attend immigrant visas or apply for the 'green cards' until further notice. Despite all these politically driven obstacles, students from all over the world are looking for the opportunities to get their higher education abroad, and in the United States.

### *3.3.4 Motivations.*

Why we do what we do? What determines our actions? What drives our behavior and helps to address some universal needs? It appears that motivation underlies the very core of every human behavior and has a great impact on the decision-making process. Motivation is a basis for action and a strong empowering tool. Psychologists, educators, and sociologies have been studying motivation from intrinsic and extrinsic perspectives for some time (Sansone & Harackiewicz, 2000; Murayama, 2018). Intrinsic motivations refer to behavior that is driven by internal rewards, while extrinsic motivations are driven by potential, long term beneficial outcomes (Stirling, 2013). This research is important because I am interested in my research participants' motivations for, and impressions of, coming to UAA to study.

Researchers working in the field of cross-cultural education determine different types of motivations. Amongst major ones, there are economical (Batalova, Hooker, & Capps, 2014), political (Dreher & Poutvaara, 2011), and social reasons (Batalova, 2014) for studying abroad. Among major motivation theories, social scientist determine 1) the theory of integrative motivation described in the context of foreign language learning as motivation to better understanding and integrate into another culture (Gardner & Lambert, 1972); 2) attribution theory aimed to determine the cause of human behavior or event (Weiner, 2005); and 3) self-determination theory (SDT) defining autonomy, relatedness and competence as basic types of

human needs (Deci & Ryan, as cited in Batalova, Hooker, & Capps, 2014). Based on this theory, “competence and self-determination are the main psychological needs for the internally motivated activity” (Batalova, Hooker, & Capps, 2014, p.125). According to SDT, our behaviors, in general, vary with respect to the degree of autonomy and can be generalized as self-determined (autonomous) behaviors and non-self-determined (controlled). Respectively, autonomous motivations are internally perceived and reflect intrinsic interests (e.g., personal curiosity), own will and values of the individual, while controlled motivations depend on external incentives (e.g., better pay) or internal pressure (e.g., sense of guilt, family expectations) (Yang, Zhang, & Sheldon, 2018).

Cross-cultural research shows that foreign students' motivations differ from their local peers due to major differences in their concepts of life and success, and hypothetically, foreign students get motivated for studies more easily than those students living in the area (Kazakova & Shastina, 2019). While local students maintaining their usual way of life have searched for inner motivations, foreign students experience higher mental and physical discomfort, which strengthens their motivation in achieving their outer goal (e.g. graduation).

### *3.3.5 Culture shock and self-determined motivations.*

While studying abroad offers many opportunities for personal and professional growth and exploration, it also brings a wide range of challenges related to leaving a familiar world and immersion into a new language, customs and ways of living, referred to as ‘cultural shock.’ Oberg (1960) defines culture shock as “precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse” (p. 177). The modern definition of this phenomenon in the context of international education refers to a set of psychological and

mental experiences occurring during transition from one cultural setting onto another that negatively impacts student's sociocultural adaptation (Presbitero, 2016).

In the qualitative research focused on the ratio between self-determined motivation and cultural adaptation of international students (Yang, Zhang & Sheldon, 2018), the authors tested SDT theory and examined how self-determined motivation to study abroad relates to culture shock and subjective well-being of international students. The study found that “self-determined students are better prepared to engage in social activities and build connections” in the foreign situation, also they are more likely to satisfy basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) and to avoid negative effects of culture shock compared to those students who had controlled motivations (Yang, Zhang & Sheldon, 2018, p. 97-101). Now, where does this self-determination of IS come from? Can it be traced back to a personality or to the upbringing? According to SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017), self-determined intrinsic motivations originate in individuals’ innate desire to explore, to understand, and to adapt to the world around them. It is important to note that such motivations are different from conditioned external motivations that sometimes can be dictated by social norms, codes, and expectations. This makes me assume that the majority of IS are intrinsically motivated when they try to adapt and thrive in a foreign place. IS express big interest to a new environment in which they chose to be, they enjoy this sense of exploration, excitement, and pioneering. The fact that most of IS face the need to accept responsibilities, to occupy a niche in a new society, and make independent decisions on a daily basis being far away from the family, all these factors contributes to their sense of autonomy and effective adjustment in a foreign environment.

Without a doubt, motivations play a central role in human development and learning,

and the creation of programs giving an account to internal motivations of international students, their self-determination, and sociocultural adaptation becomes an issue that requires thorough research and finding effective solutions.

### *3.3.6 Stress of acculturation and language barrier.*

While stress is not a culturally specific issue, each person looks at this world “through stress-colored glasses” and what one individual sees as temporary obstacle, another might see as a life threat (Solvic, 2008, p.146). The number of potential obstacles and threats increases with each new mile leading away from the home culture. Transition from one socio-cultural (and often natural) environment to another evokes a wide range of emotions, from excitement and enthusiasm to sense of loneliness and anxiety.

A qualitative study conducted with 141 international students from six countries studying at the University of London (henceforth, UL) showed that IS, compared to their local peers, in addition to ‘academic shock,’ experience great amount of social and cultural shock, sense of loneliness, isolation, and lack of social network due to new linguistic and cultural environment leading to a cumulative stress (Solvic, 2008). At first, UL ISs who volunteered to participate in a study answered a short-written questionnaire with basic details about their educational background, studying abroad motivations, support services, etc. After that, some students participated in semi-structured interviews. It is very important to note that interviews with IS were conducted in their native languages by their co-nationals, which allowed to collect some profound experiences. Many students reported a lack of comprehension, feeling lost and left out because the faculty often focusing on majority, on local students, who “grasp immediately” due to their language fluency. For example, one South Korean IS shared:

When I give a presentation, other students ask me about my work and I have to answer immediately. But if I don't understand, I cannot answer properly. It's particularly difficult to understand young students who speak very fast. I cannot catch their accent. Then, I miss a lot for my study... Language is an obstacle not only for my learning but also for my social life. I'm really scared to speak to English students. I'm too shy. (Solvic, 2008, p. 151)

Isolation and failure to form friendships with local students was another challenge shared by Japanese IS: “ Sometimes when I get really stuck on something and I can't talk to anyone, like talk to a tutor, that's the most stressful thing for me” (Solvic, 2008, p. 151). Solvic (2008) also suggested that IS need more opportunities for integration and interactions with local students in order to overcome a sense of fear and isolation and to feel a part of a larger community and increase their capacity to express themselves effectively.

Another qualitative study, called *Coming to America* by Dr. Leong (2015) from Salem State University, used the interview data from 11 IS (to include, seven from China, one from Sweden, one from Nepal, one from Côte d'Ivoire, and one from Afghanistan) collected during the Fall 2013 semester in order to examine challenges experienced by foreign students, compared to students from China, the top sending country. The study also showed that the language barrier was the biggest challenge experienced by international students. The lack of English proficiency was not only negatively affecting students' academic performance but also “undermined the students' ability to communicate with peers and others, occasionally leading to miscommunication and misunderstandings, as well as the inability to form friendships” (Leong, 2015, p. 464). Cultural differences, financial challenges, differences in academic

expectations and teaching methods negatively impact interactions between IS and American peers. Often, local students and faculty misinterpret the behavior of IS and give a wrong connotation. Dr. Leong suggested that “it is crucial that American institutions of higher learning develop better ways to help these students avoid communication difficulties and help foster a more positive and cooperative relationships” (Leong, 2015, p. 473).

Rabia & Karkouti (2017) researched factors affecting Arab IS’ experiences in the United States. For this study, researchers used in-depth interview method to collect data from 16 students from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Syria, UAE, Iraq, and Jordan enrolled at two universities in the Northeast of the United States. The interview consisted of six open-ended questions focused on the factors that had a positive impact on cultural adaptation of Arab IS. Similarly to other studies reviewed above, the data analysis showed the importance of friendship, social life, family support, and interactions with American peers. Amongst successful practices helping Arab international students to overcome academic and social challenges, authors highlighted the importance of the international community and friends with similar cultural background (Rabia & Karkouti, 2017).

### *3.3.7 Cultural intelligence.*

There is probably no other environment more complex and demanding than a foreign country. Cultural intelligence is described as knowledge how to think and act in a complex environment (Study International Stuff, 2018). IS are forced to build a cultural intelligence that will bolster their academic and career success. Thompson (2018) conducted a series of in-depth interviews with IS studying at the U.S. southern private university focusing on the role of their emotional and cultural intelligence in the social integration process. This study was

conducted using a phenomenological approach that allowed to give meaning to students' experiences "as related to emotional and cultural intelligence" and to provide a background of the "cultural beliefs and norms that contributed to their emotional and cultural intelligence" (Thompson, 2018, p. 2030). The findings revealed that many cultural differences experienced by international students cause a change in their social behavior, emotional discomfort, and, in some cases, loss of own identity when students try to adopt foreign cultural norms. The author suggested that these obstacles could be overcome by a better understanding of the American culture through institutions' social programs and cultural resources (Thompson, 2018).

In another qualitative phenomenological study also called *Coming to America*, Wu (2018) examined the specific needs of IS and the relationship between university satisfaction and degree completion. The data collected through open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview revealed that over forty percent of the respondents reported feeling discriminated due to their cultural differences, which added to a negative feeling about the university experience in general. This study also pointed out the fact that friendship and social engagement are highly important components in contributing to satisfaction among international students. In addition to that, it was found that internships and part-time jobs play a significant role in students' sense of security, sustainability, and emotional satisfaction (Wu, 2018, p. 158-163).

However, even during the time of shifting socio-political climate and timeless acculturation challenges, Western Michigan University (WMU) shared some successful practices in regards to IS. WMU faculty and school administration created a welcoming environment for ISs including creating space for Muslim students to pray and organizing a

panel discussion to address fears and questions related to a 2017 travel ban (Bowman, 2018). Overall, the cross-cultural research shows that academically mobile students tend to demonstrate a higher level of emotional and personal maturity (Duranczyk & Pincherskaia, 2018). The construct of autonomy and social support remain to be the most effective practices helping these students to overcome the sense of loneliness, cultural isolation and to successfully adjust to a new environment (Aldawsari, Adams, & Grimes, 2018).

The rest of this study is outlined as follows. The literature review in Chapter Three has provided me with guidance in international education tendencies and contemporary issues related to the socio-political situation in the world. I also discussed major theories of motivation and migration that served me as a basis for understanding intrinsic needs and the process of self-determination of my participants. Peer-reviewed studies presented in the literature review provided me with some great examples of how different universities in the United States help their IS communities to address contemporary challenges related to academic, psychological, and socio-economic situation, as well as a growing sense of uncertainty and insecurity related to the U.S. foreign policy. Chapter Four will discuss the role of global education citizenship and cosmopolitanism in the contemporary world and how these global ideas are being embodied locally in Alaska. Chapter Five will outline the research questions and explain the methodology implemented in this work. Chapter Six will provide the results and of my research inquiries in thematic order and describe emerging tendencies. Chapter Seven will expound the conclusions of this study, demonstrate some implications for school administration and faculty working with IS.



## **Chapter 4**

### **Cosmopolitanism and Global Citizenship**

Globalization has penetrated our lives in many different ways. The increase of world population along with increasing mobility, human displacement due to social and natural disasters, international corporations and global supply chains, as well as opportunities to get employment or education overseas have tremendously challenged the sense of human identity and basis of belonging to the nation state. Today, more and more people holding multiple citizenships. In the light of these processes, higher education worldwide becomes directly impacted by such dynamics, and one the critical goals of modern education is raising responsible global citizens. In this chapter, I would like to discuss the notions of global citizenship and cosmopolitanism and their role in today's global education.

Here I would like to quote words of the 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States Barack Obama and the first African American elected to the White House whose commitment to the global development, diversity, equality, and inclusion was repeatedly proven during his presidential term.

Simple exchanges can break down walls between us, for when people come together and speak to one another and share a common experience, then their common humanity is revealed. We are reminded that we're joined together by our pursuit of a life that's productive and purposeful, and when that happens, mistrust begins to fade, and our smaller differences no longer overshadow the things that we share.

– Barack H. Obama (NAFSA, 2017)

#### *4.1 Global citizenship.*

What does it mean to be a citizen of the world? What does this notion mean in terms of a race, religion, class, nationality, education, and human identity? While currently we are not citizens of one state, and it is highly unlikely that we will ever become, we should care about one another as of fellow citizens of the world. Since the focus of this study is on education, let's look at what global citizenship education might look like. Farahani (2014) stated that modern students should be taught such skills and values which will help them to become active members of the world community and make them aware, critical and sociable citizens. In other words, students need the knowledge, skills, and attitudes enabling them "to have an active role in different areas as a member of the world community" (Farahani, 2014, p. 936). To better explain what these knowledge, skills and values are, the author offered a graphic table (please see Figure 2).

Hence, the role of global citizenship education in the modern society is hard to overestimate. Farahani's table can be comprised to the following characteristics of a global citizen:

- 1) active participation in local and global issues;
- 2) attempt to influence and shape policies;
- 3) advocacy of certain ideas;
- 4) critical thinking, ability to see a bigger picture and to make a fair judgement;
- 5) empathy and respect towards other people and points of view that are different.

While the author highlights the role of the official education system in raising global citizens, he also emphasizes that we as a civic society, along with local leaders, should get involved in

citizenship education. Our governments should actively work on “establishing an appropriate institutional education framework” by implementing relevant initiatives specialized in global citizenship (Farahani, 2014, p. 938).

KNOWLEDGE DEVELOPMENT AND UNDERSTANDING	SKILLS	VALUES AND ATTITUDES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Social equality</li> <li>-Awareness of the destructive and harmful factors for the environment</li> <li>-Awareness of international law</li> <li>-Awareness of the role of government in establishing democracy</li> <li>- Awareness of the differences between political institutions of different countries</li> <li>- Awareness of the citizenship role in an international scale</li> <li>- Awareness of the globalization and interdependence</li> <li>-Awareness of the global aspect of the issues such as immigration, trade, consumer's rights, ... and fatal malaria</li> <li>-Awareness of different types of government in different countries and the major characteristics of their parliaments.</li> <li>Awareness of the different religious national and moral identities of different countries</li> <li>-Awareness of the influencing factors in sustainable development and peace</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Critical thinking</li> <li>- Accepting and respecting pluralism in society</li> <li>- Respecting others' rights ability to challenge injustice and inequalities</li> <li>- Mutual understanding ability</li> <li>- Participation and cooperation ability</li> <li>- Respect for people and things</li> <li>- Respect for traditions and culture of other countries</li> <li>- Ability to evaluate different global issues</li> <li>- Dialogue and communicating ability</li> <li>- Logical and just decision making</li> <li>- Accountability , cooperation, and conflict settlement ability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Thankfulness attitude towards cultural heritage of other countries</li> <li>- Being interested in human rights</li> <li>- Concern for the environment safety</li> <li>- Sense of identity and self esteem</li> <li>- Commitment to social justice and equality</li> <li>- Tolerating opposing views</li> <li>- respect for human beings</li> <li>- valuing and respecting diversity</li> <li>- Concern for his own and others' peace and welfare</li> <li>- Sense of patriotism</li> <li>- Law oriented attitude</li> <li>- Tendency towards justice and truth seeking</li> </ul>

Figure 2: Global Citizenship in higher education (Farahani, 2014, p. 936).

#### *4.2 Cosmopolitanism.*

Social scientists and philosophers working in the field of globalization started reanimating the ancient idea of cosmopolitanism as an “alternative to forces in globalization” that draw on consumerism and individualism leading towards environmental degradation (Hansen, 2010, p. 2). Appiah (2007) in the attempt to trace the origins of the term ‘cosmopolitan’ goes back to fourth century BC to Cynic proclamation of ‘citizen of cosmos’ as skepticism towards existing customs and traditions. The skepticism aimed towards rejection of the old view that “every civilized person belonged to a community among communities” (p. 14). In contrast, the new notion of cosmopolitanism was constructed of ‘*cosmos*,’ referring to the large world in the sense of the whole universe, and ‘*polites*,’ a citizen of a particular polis, a city. In other words, cosmopolitan was interpreted as a citizen of the whole universe, of the entire known world. Later, this idea was elaborated by the Stoics and gained some spiritual context through Christian intellectuals (after Christianity became the Religion of the Roman Empire) calling to the oneness of humanity referring to St. Pauls’ “there is neither Jew no Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male or female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Appiah, 2007, p. 15).

What does modern cosmopolitanism look like? Is it only an ability to live in a metropolis enjoying exotic cuisines, music, fashion, and international travel? It appears that cosmopolitanism is about participation and engagement in global processes, it is about being an active agent of change. From the perspective of education, cosmopolitanism “constitutes an approach toward deepening people’s creative ability to balance openness and loyalty” (Hansen, 2010, p. 24). Now, are people going to live up to the ideas of cosmopolitanism? While there is an attempt in a contemporary world to reach the cosmopolitan state of being,

the state of oneness, it is important to remember that it is rather an ideal that calls us towards seeing the value in human diversity and care for strangers. Also, while there are some better practices around the world, they are not universal truths, and cosmopolitanism expects people to be different. Dr. Appiah (2007) in his pursuit of truth in a contemporary world highlighted that cosmopolitanism is also about respect to legitimate freedom to “associate with own kind – to keep the rest of the world away as the Amish do in the United States” (Appiah, 2007, p. 20). Since the Enlightenment, Europeans started practicing cosmopolitan views by opening up to perception of foreign art and literature and to the opportunities to live in a faraway place. This is the time when, according to Appiah (2007), people started to recognize that yes, human beings are different, but they can learn so much from each other’s differences.

#### *4.3 Cosmopolitanism in Anchorage.*

Cosmopolitanism is “not something that happens to people, it is something that people do” and this diversity makes communities so much better (Hansen, 2010, p. 23). We can find the idea of cosmopolitanism echoing in Alaska through some local initiatives supported by the Anchorage municipality and Mayor’s office. Back in 2014, Anchorage joined the national Welcoming Cities project which is a part of Welcoming America movement of inclusiveness and diversity (Welcoming America, 2020). In a collaborative effort with local government, businesses and non-profit organizations, this initiative aims to “reinforce Anchorage as culturally vibrant 21<sup>st</sup> century community” with rich traditional heritage and to recognize “economic, cultural, and social contributions that immigrants and refugees make to Anchorage communities” (Welcoming Anchorage, 2019, para. 4). The Welcoming Anchorage initiative built upon five pillars: 1) employment and entrepreneurship; 2) civic engagement; 3) safe and healthy communities; 4) equitable access to resources; and

5) education. While there are such initiatives taking place in Anchorage, Alaska already, the University of Alaska has great chances to become a leader in this enterprise and to support diversity and inclusiveness of our communities through education and cross-cultural learning.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Research Methodology**

#### **5.1 Research Questions**

In this study, I am focusing on three major questions:

- 1) What motivates international students from the RFE to pursue their higher education in the United States, at the UAA?
- 2) How do RFE international students describe their experience at the UAA?
- 3) How can UAA better address the needs and increase the enrolment of RFE international students?

#### **5.2 Methodology**

In this qualitative study, I applied a phenomenological approach to capture participants' perceptions, individual insights, and examine the way RFE students informed their decision to study at the UAA, and how they are making sense of their lived experiences (Creswell, 2012). The phenomenological approach is rooted in the 20<sup>th</sup> century phenomenological philosophy with its interpretation of reality as a product of one's consciousness and choices. On one hand, this approach enables researchers to "walk a mile in the shoes" of study participants, on the other hand, it brings considerable latitude and uniqueness of insights (Padgett, 2012, p. 42). I believe that this approach is best suited in my attempt to identify the phenomenon of interest (aspiration), to reveal the 'essence' of intrinsic motivations and common themes in experiences of IS from RFE. In addition to that, I implemented an autoethnographic method of inquiry. This qualitative approach allowed me to give a reflective account of my own experience as a foreign student at UAA and to connect my personal story

to wider cultural and social meanings (Marechal, 2010).

In order to answer my research questions and to examine RFE students' experiences at UAA, I employed a voluntarily survey questionnaire and in-depth interview methods. Why did I choose these research methods? The survey questionnaire (please see Appendix A) helped me to collect and systematize needed information, reveal and describe phenomena of IS' experiences in a time and cost-effective manner.

For the purpose of this study, I used the storytelling method to share my own experience of being a foreign student in Alaska and to reveal some valuable insights of my participants during the one-on-one in-depth interviews. According to Clare Patey, Director of the Empathy Museum (2020), storytelling is an entry point to understand different ways to experience this world. I built my findings on information revealed through tapping into the stories of my participants and learning about their worlds and perspectives. In-depth interviews (please see Appendix B for interview protocol) enabled me to receive profound data on RFE students' personal experiences, visions, and suggestions. I believe that an in-depth interview with its open-ended questions enabled me to achieve needed depth and to access some lived experiences of my participants. Besides that, it gave them an opportunity to express what was important to them in regard to the topic and what hasn't been covered in a structured survey portion. Additionally, I conducted two interviews with representatives of UAA faculty and administration – UAA Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs Dr. B. Shultz and UAA Adjuncts Professor of Japanese A. Salov (please see Appendix C). These inquiries allowed me to look at the topic of IS at UAA from two different perspectives and to draw some valuable implications.



### **5.3 Sampling**

In my research, I implemented a criterion sampling. This means, I chose participants who meet a specific criterion (Abu, 2016). Criterion sampling is conducted to best contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon, participants' experiences (Creswell, 2012). Over the period of one month (November 2019), I collected data from 21 participants from the RFE, males and females at the age from 22 to 30-year-old, who were international students on the F-1 visa at the UAA, enrolled in a different academic programs within the past 5-6 years. I used my personal connections to reach out to the researched group (friends, former schoolmates, etc.). My participants were contacted via email with the introductory letter explaining the goal of the research and ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of all responses. I conducted five in-depth interviews (three one-on-one interviews and two interviews over the phone) with students who volunteered to expand their survey responses. During these interviews, I was taking notes and used an audio recording in those cases when my participants agreed to be recorded. Additionally, I was able to conduct two one-on-one interviews with representatives of UAA faculty and administration to learn their perspectives and vision of the situation with IS on UAA campus.

Upon completion of the interview process, I carefully transcribed all responses received from seven participants. All transcribed data is being securely stored for five year at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, after that it will be destroyed per IRB protocol (please see Appendix D).

## **5.4 Data Coding Process**

Questionnaires and interview data were processed in the following steps:

1) I used SurveyMonkey software to collect survey data from my participants. Twenty-one participant received electronic invitation and introductory letter and completed the survey from their phones or computers. During the seven in-depth interviews, I used notetaking and audio recording.

2) All responses are coded in numbers and charts. Pseudonyms are used to ensure students' anonymity and confidentiality of shared information.

3) Similar answers are grouped together. The data were organized and analyzed with the help of SurveyMonkey software.

4) The notes taken during in-depth interviews were carefully transcribed and passed to principle investigator for secure storing (please see Appendix D for the IRB Protocol).

5) Color-coded charts were utilized to highlight the major themes and to describe the significance of the experiences reported and validate the phenomenon of the study (Rabia & Karkouti, 2017, p. 350).

6) Connections between data sources and interview responses were made in order to present the accuracy and transferability of the phenomenon and to develop effective application strategies for the findings.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Survey and Interview Results**

The first step in this research was to collect survey data from the RFE IS. Each potential participant was contacted via email or social media. The initial message contained an introductory letter explaining the purpose of a project and invitation to participate in my study. Those IS who replied back and expressed their interest to participate in a project, received a second message containing the link to SurveyMonkey where they could take a survey. I received 21 completed surveys out of 29 invitations.

The second step was to recruit five participants who would volunteer to expand their survey responses to share their experiences in a one-on-one interview. Additionally, I was able to interview one representative of UAA administration and one UAA faculty member. This process was interesting and engaging. Responses received from RFE IS and UAA administration enabled me to gather the information that follows in this thesis.

#### **6.1 Survey Analysis**

By implementing the survey method into my research, I aimed to investigate what guided students' decision to come to study at UAA, to learn about their background, demographics, main challenges and needs at college. Questions implemented in my survey helped me to reveal some valuable insights, explore major motivations and factors that shaped overall experience of my participants in Alaska. In the time effective manner, the survey method helped me to receive data that is easy to interpret and to transform into charts.

*Statement of consent.* All participants of the study anonymously signed and dated the Statement of Consent before answering questions (Introductory Letter) electronically or in person.

*Time.* Based on SurveyMonkey results, on average, my participants spent about 12 minutes to answer the survey questions.

*Years when attended UAA.* The survey showed that participants of this study attended UAA between 2011 and 2019.

*Demographics.* Based on the criterion sampling, all participants came to study at UAA from the Far East of Russia. Based on survey responses, the majority of students, came from Vladivostok, Primorsky Krai (please see Table 3). Additionally, please see geographic locations of designated cities on a general map of the Russian Far East (please see Figure 3).

Table 3: Demographics of IS

City	Number of IS
Vladivostok, Primorsky Krai	12
Khabarovsk, Khabarovsk Krai	4
Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, Sakhalin	3
Komsomolsk-on-the-Amur	1
Yakutsk	1



Figure 3: Demographics of the study participants from the RFE (Wikitravel, 2019).

*Majors pursued at UAA.* IS from the RFE were enrolled in various degree programs across the campus. Some students pursued double majors, and some decided to continue their education at UAA in a Graduate school. Based on students' responses, I have concluded that degrees in Management, Marketing, and Logistics attracted the highest number of IS from the RFE. Most IS are interested in getting business-related education at UAA. Please see Table 4 for details.

Table 4: Majors pursued at UAA by the survey participants

<b>Undergraduate Degree Major</b>	<b>Quantity of IS</b>
Management & Marketing	5
Global Logistics and Supply Chain Management	6
Management Information System	2
Business & Management	1
Finance	1
Accounting	1
Economics	1
International Studies	1
Physical Therapy	1
Journalism & Public Communications	1
Psychology	1
<b>Graduate Degree Major</b>	<b>Quantity of IS</b>
MBA, General Management	2
MBA, Business Intelligence	1

*Sources of funding.* The majority (95.24%) of responders stated that their major source of financial support while they studied at UAA were parents and relatives. Additionally, over the half of IS (57.14%) stated that they used their own money from working on campus and other savings to attend the UAA (please see Figure 4).

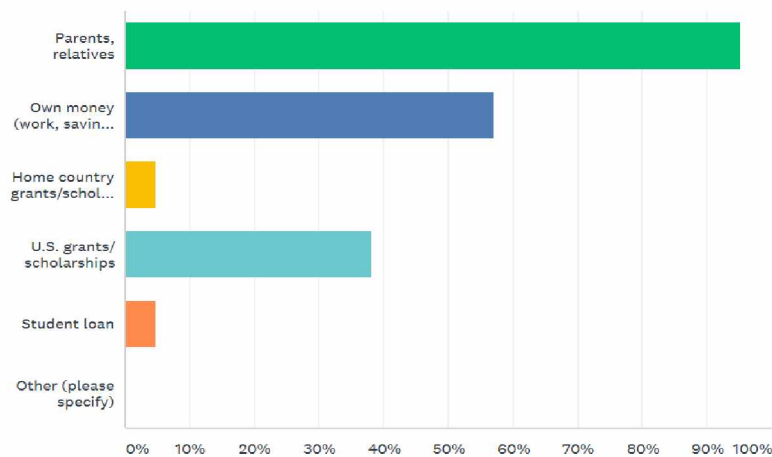


Figure 4: Source of funding when studied at UAA

*Independent students vs. organized exchange group.* It was interesting to find out that about half of RFE IS (52.38%) came to study at UAA as organized exchange through the joint degree program between Russian universities and UAA. One-on-one interviews and other survey responses showed that these programs were highly advertised back in Russia by home universities and many students knew that they will be studying 2 years in Russia and 2 years overseas when they enrolled to college. Another half of the RFE students came to UAA as independent, individual students (please see Figure 5).

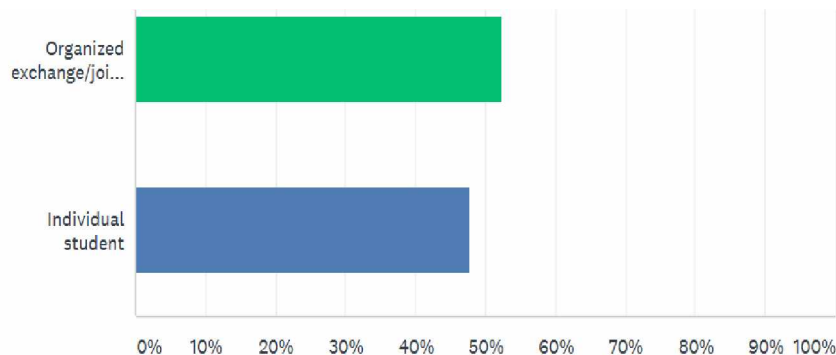


Figure 5: Independent students vs. organized exchange group

*Factors to study in the United States.* The survey responses showed that for the majority of RFE IS chance to improve English skills (95.24%) along with the quality and international recognition of college degree earned in the United States (80.95%) were principal factors that influenced their decision to study in America. Among other reasons that guided such decision, IS named the opportunity to secure potential career abroad (61.90%) and chances to expand their experience in the field of study (61.90%) (please see Figure 6).

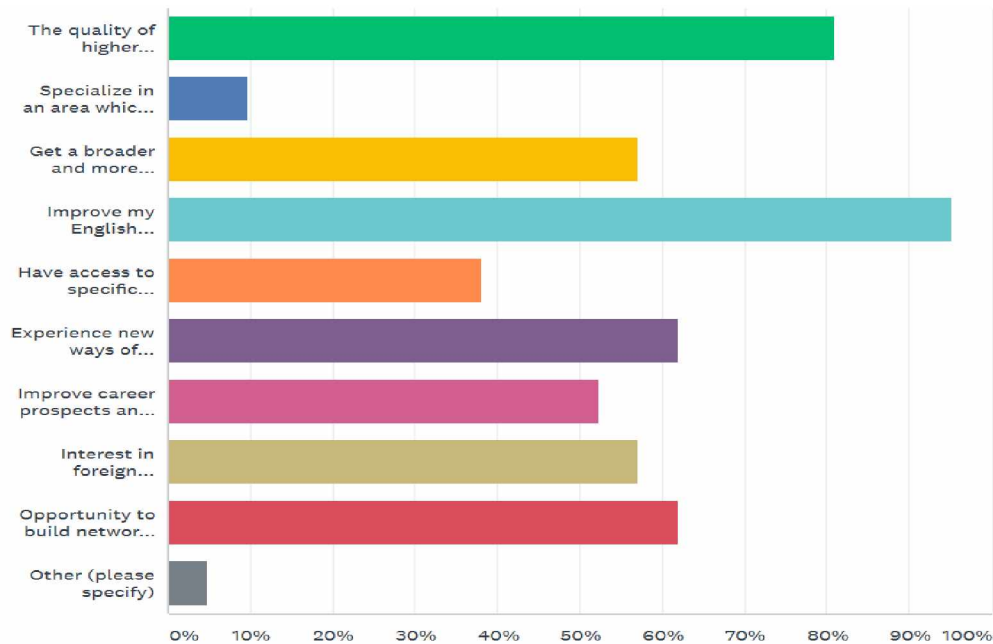


Figure 6: Influencing factors to study in the United States

*Sources of learning about UAA.* Most responses received from IS showed that home universities back in Russia (47.62%) were the main source of information that influenced students' decision to study at UAA. Additionally, IS were learning about the opportunity to study at UAA through personal connections, such as friends or family members already studying in Alaska or elsewhere in the United States (33.33%) (please see Figure 7).



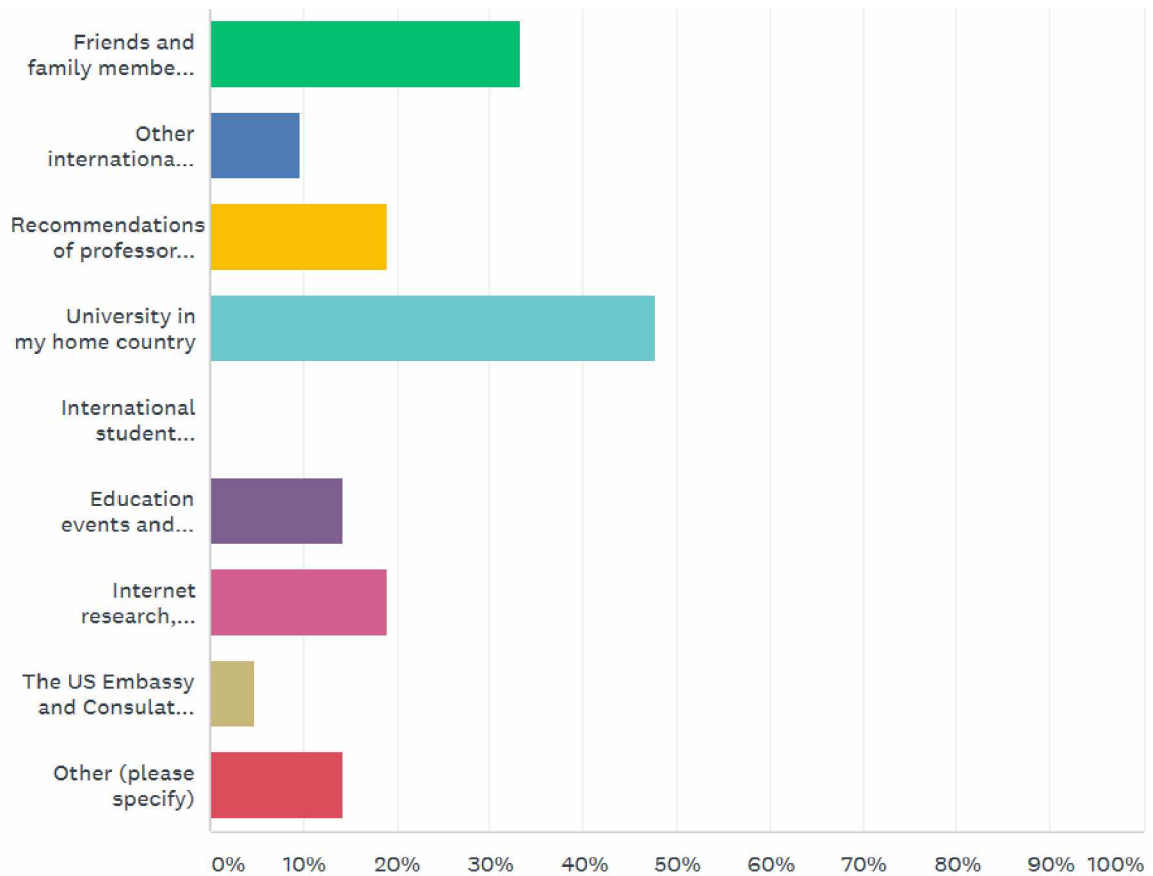


Figure 7: Sources of learning about UAA

*Influencing factors to study in Alaska, at UAA.* The survey responses showed that generally, students' decision to study in Alaska and at UAA was influenced by special programs between UAA and universities back in Russia (90.48%) offering double degrees (Russian and American) upon graduation. The affordability of tuition and cost of living (76.19%) were other big reasons that made IS chose to study at UAA (please see Figure 8).

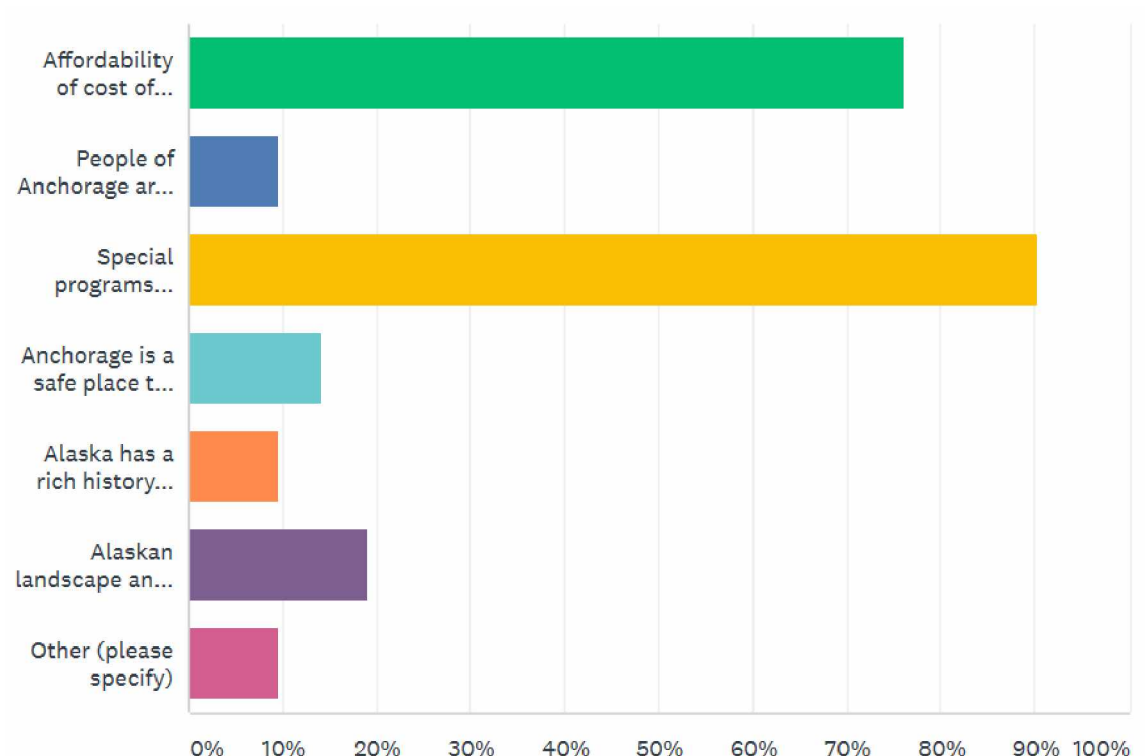


Figure 8: Influencing factors to study in Alaska, at UAA

*Challenges at UAA.* The data revealed through surveys showed that the language barrier (55%) and meeting the financial needs (55%) were equally challenging and significant factors for IS during their time at UAA. It is important to note that among other challenges students didn't name academic-related issues, but rather a logistical and organizational difficulties. For instance, students stated that complicated visa process (30%) and lack of communication between UAA and home universities in Russia (30%) were among other essential challenges (please see Figure 9).

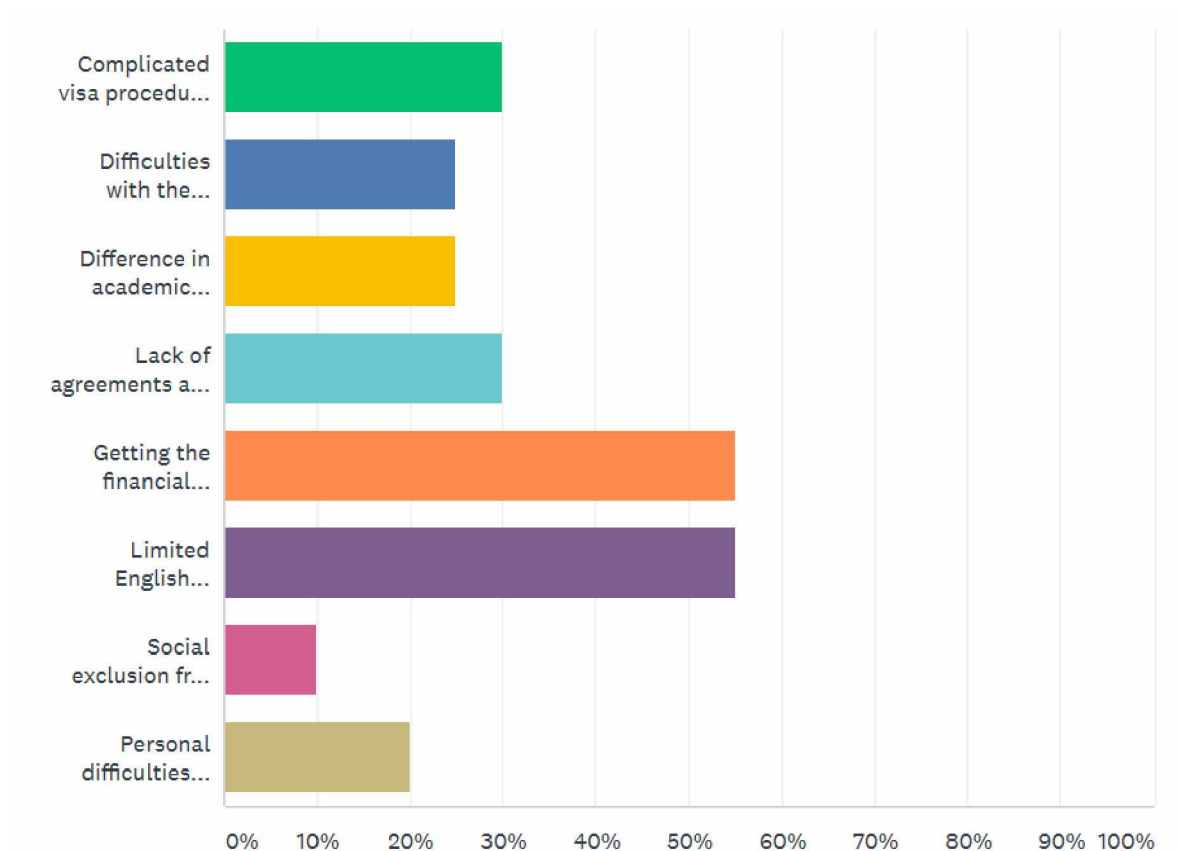


Figure 9: Challenges at UAA

*Helpful practices.* Based on students responses, I concluded that community support, building friendship with other IS and local peers, involvement into campus life, as well as constant support and encouragement from the faculty members were the most helpful practices that enable IS to better adapt and succeed in a new environment. It was also interesting to note that some students draw on their personal strengths, such as discipline and commitment, that helped them during their time at UAA (please see Table 5).

Table 5: Helpful practices at UAA

Helpful practices	Student survey responses
Supportive community & friends	<p>“I found a very supportive community among my fellow friends on campus.”</p> <p>“My friends, university and community involvement.”</p> <p>“International community, supportive friends and Russian-American Center.”</p> <p>“Meeting other Russian friends.”</p> <p>“Making friends from all over the world and get to learn things about their cultures.”</p>
Supportive faculty & staff	<p>“Great professors!”</p> <p>“Interesting classes and great professors.”</p> <p>“Advisors helped me to navigate my schedule and the most convenient and efficient way to graduate.”</p>

Table 5 (Continued):

Engagement in the university life	<p>“Being active on campus, meeting more people, making an impact, growing professionally.”</p> <p>“Networking and internships.”</p> <p>“Ability to work on campus.”</p> <p>“I was very pleased that I had opportunity to work on campus, because it’s hard to afford living in the U.S. relying on just sponsorship from your parents.”</p>
Personal characteristics	<p>“Commitment and discipline.”</p> <p>“Flexibility.”</p> <p>“Open mind.”</p>

*Services that need to be offered at UAA.* The open-ended survey questions regarding the services that are not currently offered at UAA or offered in a limited capacity, revealed some valuable insights. From students responses, I have concluded that IS would like to see some improvements in International Student Office at UAA in order to be able to receive more adequate support from IS advisors regarding legal matters (such as visas, credit

transfers, taxes), living conditions (assistance with finding more affordable housing, transportation), and culturally relevant activities and clubs. Additionally, IS would like to see more opportunities to secure funding to pay the tuition cost (more job opportunities for IS, more scholarships). Please see major themes and student responses presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Services needed

Services that needed at UAA	Student survey responses
<p>Better assistance on behalf of the International Student Office and IS advisor</p>	<p>“More professional International Students staff members. Career fairs that target towards OPT [Optional Practical Training] students.”</p> <p>“I wish there was better onboarding process in regard to communications as well as better explanation of American education system.”</p> <p>“Helpful to have an advisor that speaks your native language and understands the culture you are coming from.”</p> <p>“Help with translation of school documents. Advise on credit transfers from foreign universities.”</p> <p>“Better international advisors.”</p>

Table 6 (Continued):

<p>Assistance with housing; orientation regarding local norms and expectations</p>	<p>“Help on filing taxes because it’s super different from what citizens have to do and the rules change almost every year. It’s a big struggle for IS.”</p> <p>“It would be nice to get to know some basic things that every American pupil knows. How to present yourself in a new culture, how to do legal things, what are professors’ expectations. It was frustrating.”</p> <p>“UAA should reorganize the current International Student office. If that isn’t possible, they should offer help to new students with finding resources that will help them to study and live in Alaska.”</p> <p>“It takes time to socialize in a new country. So, good advising center for international students would be an amazing solution.”</p> <p>“Legal support or some kind of orientation, i.e. how to file taxes, immigration documents, etc.”</p> <p>“Help with housing (renting apartment or a room).”</p>
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Table 6 (Continued):

<p>More opportunities for financial security</p>	<p>“Being able to work outside of campus while studying. It’s hard to find a job on campus.”</p> <p>“More financial assistance.”</p> <p>“Career sponsorship.”</p>
<p>Multicultural events and safe space for IS</p>	<p>“Culture workshops and social events for international students.”</p> <p>“It would be amazing if new international students would have a place to go in difficult situations where they would get information about different services.”</p> <p>“Create more programs for international students that will help them to be more involved in social life and activities.”</p>



*Things learned.* Before coming to study in Alaska, IS had some expectations and envisioned their life in Anchorage based on information that was available. Some of their expectations were met and grouped by themes among helpful practices, some expectations were not met and those were grouped by themes as needed services. At the same time, there are always room for things that come as a surprise. From students' responses, I have concluded that Alaska was an eye-opening experience and, in many ways, exceeded their expectations. Students' responses highlighted the richness of Alaska history, culture and natural environment. Few students stated Alaskan infrastructure and educational opportunities are well developed. Some mentioned going through some sort of cultural shock when they tried to adapt to new cultural norms and standards and when they realized how different Alaska is from the rest of the country (please see Table 7).

Table 7: Things learned

Things learned in Alaska about Alaska	Student survey responses
Cultural richness	<p>“I didn’t know how big was Native Alaskan population here. I didn’t know that Anchorage is the most diverse city in the country, if not in the world!”</p> <p>“History and traditions.”</p> <p>“It was a cultural shock in a good way.”</p> <p>“It was a completely different world. I watched many movies about America back in Russia, but those movies were about life in New York or Los Angeles. So I was a bit shocked.”</p> <p>“How diverse this country really is, how different Alaska is from what I knew before.”</p>

Table 7 (Continued):

<p>People</p>	<p>“People are more friendly here and willing to help, compare to my country of origin.”</p> <p>“I was pleased to find out that people in the U.S. are very welcoming and willing to help; they say “sorry” and “what’s up a lot.”</p> <p>“I learned that not everyone in America knows that Alaska is part of the United States.”</p> <p>“Corporate culture and values of American people.”</p>
<p>Nature</p>	<p>“You can see northern lights from your porch.”</p> <p>“Fairbanks has hot springs.”</p> <p>“I didn’t know how fast it was getting dark during the winter and I could not imagine that moose are walking everywhere in a city.”</p> <p>“Anchorage Earthquake of 1964. Denali is the highest mountain in North America.”</p>

It is interesting to note that in a final commentary block, many students expressed their hope that UAA renews and continues exchange programs with Russian universities, because this opportunity, despite all challenges and imperfections, was a life changing experience for many of them. Here are just a few quotes from the anonymous student responses:

“Increase promotion about UAA Exchange program in other cities in Russia.

Maybe promote such programs in high schools, so students can plan their future before they enroll into college.”

“Keep exchange programs going. It would be nice to have more students to come from different countries, especially from Russia.”

“I think UAA should advertise their programs abroad more heavily.”

“Keep the program open, it is a great opportunity for many!”

“Promote UAA exchange programs in Vladivostok and Russia.”

### **6.1.1 Summary and Reflections of Survey Results**

The survey inquiry method turned out to be great way to collect the important data in a time effective manner with a complete confidentiality of all participants. The gathered data revealed many interesting and sometimes surprising insights and helped me to understand perspectives and experiences of my responders. In this unit, I would like to share a brief summary of the survey results.

As it was expected initially, the majority of my participants (12 students) came from Vladivostok (Primorsky Krai), Russia, the administrative center and one of the largest port cities in Russia. Prior to arriving to study at UAA, over 71% of students were enrolled to various undergraduate programs in Russian universities, where they studied at least two years. The majority of IS from RFE choose business-related degrees at UAA, and pursued degrees in Management, Marketing, and Logistics. Based on survey responses, the financial aspect of studying abroad was among greatest challenges for the participants, and over 95% of IS claimed to use family funds to pay the tuition and living expenses at UAA.

In my attempt to reveal motivations and factors that influences students' decision to pursue higher education in the United States, I found out that the high quality of American education and international recognition of the U.S. diploma was the major driving reason. Among other reasons students named a chance to improve English skills and to experience new ways of livings and acting in the field of study. Besides getting the U.S. diploma and developing some skills, students stated that they viewed study abroad as a great opportunity to invest in own future by building international network and securing potential career abroad. Now, why did RFE IS chose to come to study in Alaska? Over 67% of Russian students stated

that they learned about the opportunity to study at UAA through their home universities back in Russia, where these partnership programs were advertised by school administration. Over 90% of responders claimed that they chose to study in Alaska due to special programs between their home universities and UAA, and the discounted tuition rate (76%).

Despite the existence of special exchange programs and partnerships between universities, students stated that the agreements between universities weren't maintained properly and they experienced miscommunication and lack of support on behalf of school administrations. Besides the financial difficulties mentioned above, responders claimed to experience challenges related to complicated visa process, since all participants had to reapply and renew their F-1 student visas annually. The language barrier was also named as one of the major obstacles for IS at UAA. However, students noted that an extensive support of faculty members and other foreign students, building new friendships and community involvement helped them to overcome academic and social obstacles and to succeed at new school. Many responders additionally highlighted that international community, culturally relevant clubs and activities on campus were driving factors contributing to their successful adaptation.

Overall, based on survey responses, I concluded that the majority of students from RFE would like to see more international events and cultural programs on campus where they could meet other IS. Participants of my survey expressed a need to have an additional legal support on behalf of the university and offered to start implementing trainings related to norms and expectations of American culture, e.g., training on how to register for classes, file taxes, transfer credits, etc. Additionally, IS would suggest that communication between the UAA and home universities should be improved, and as well as current IS advising center on campus.

Finally, and most importantly, despite all challenges, many responders recognized the value of their study abroad experience and suggested to keep promoting studies in Alaska to other cities in Russia and to maintain old exchange agreements between UAA and RFE.

## **6.2 Interview Analysis**

In the course of this research, I was able to conduct one-on-one interviews with seven participants – five IS from the RFE and two UAA administration/faculty representatives. Please note, one of the participants (Dr. Salov) was able to speak from both perspectives: from the perspective of being UAA faculty, and from the perspective of being an IS from the RFE at UAA back in early 2000s.

Three students, UAA administration and faculty members were interviewed in person, and two students were interviewed via the phone, due to their relocation out of Alaska. Each interview took approximately 20-25 minutes. I used a thematic analysis method that allowed me to identify patterns and themes in responses and to grouped similar responses together. Interview responses were organized in such themes: discrimination, differences, challenges, motivations and successful practices, reasons and consequences, value of IS on campus, suggestions, etc. In this unit I would like to outline the interview results in two parts. In a first part, I will be examining how IS estimate their experiences at UAA, and in a second part, I will be presenting perspectives of the UAA administration and faculty.

### **6.2.1 Part I: Perspectives of Students**

During my interviews with IS I asked them twelve general questions listed in Appendix B. If there was a need to clarify a particular answer, I asked my participants additional short questions. Please note, in interviews with students I used pseudonyms to ensure complete

anonymity and confidentiality of release information.

#### *6.2.1.1 Discrimination.*

Our interviews were opened by a question whether IS experienced any type of discrimination during their studies at UAA. It was great to learn that no interviewed students experienced any type of discrimination or prejudices towards them as IS from faculty or other students: “I think all were treated equally. No conflicts.” (Tatiana, RFE IS). Some students noted that sometimes domestic students would make stereotypical assumptions towards them as Russians and prescribed them certain habits, such as “drinking and partying” (Nikolai, RFE IS). While one may argue that stereotyping is also a form of discrimination, based on responses received from Russian students I conclude that there was nothing raising concern or making them feel uncomfortable; I interpret this as huge achievement on behalf of the university, since a safe environment is the cornerstone for all initiatives. Based on interview responses, I conclude that UAA has a healthy inner climate towards IS and that UAA community is accepting and tolerant towards other cultures; therefore, it is a good place for international and foreign students. This complies with the Notice of Nondiscrimination that University of Alaska has (Notice of Nondiscrimination, 2020).

#### *6.2.1.2 Differences in teaching and learning.*

Leong (2015) found that cultural differences, differences in academic expectations and teaching methods tend to negatively impact interactions between IS and American peers. Often, local students and faculty misinterpret the behavior of IS and give a wrong connotation to their actions. Dr. Leong suggested that “it is crucial that American institutions of higher learning develop better ways to help these students avoid communication difficulties and help



foster a more positive and cooperative relationships” (Leong, 2015, p. 473).

What differences have IS noticed between UAA and their home universities? Which approach did they like more? In their interview responses, RFE IS described differences in teaching styles and approaches to learning, and differences in student-professor relationships at UAA compared to their home universities back in Russia. Specifically, in Russia, “teachers were actually supporting you a little bit more,” teachers are “like a second mama” and “pay more attention” (Viktoria, RFE IS). In Russia “the professor treats you almost like you are his or her son or daughter, so it becomes more personal,” while in the United States “you just do the tests, you in, you out. Just like knowledge, test, and result. That’s it. Less personal interaction” (Nikolai, RFE IS). Some refer to these differences in behavioral expectations and norms as “cultural shock.”

An English teacher from UAA who came to my university in Russia, we were speaking, and she sat on a table. That was very strange. I understood that everything is nice, and everyone is friendly, but you know, it’s kind of ‘why is she sitting on a table?’ And also, she had like a tumbler glass and she was drinking tea during the class, which is kind of unusual. (Adjunct Professor of Japanese, Dr. Alexander Salov)

In Russia, students used to getting more extensive and personalized feedback back at their home universities: “I remember I was writing some paper, and the teacher actually wrote a long-long-long comment on the paper. Here it’s more impersonal” (Adjunct Professor of Japanese, Dr. Alexander Salov). It is interesting to note that during their first year at UAA IS tend to like teaching and learning styles that they got used to back in Russia, but with the time when they adjusted to a new environment, they started liking the American

approach more: “I liked when people carried about me deeply, they would connect to me personally. But then, like now, maybe because I have grown up and something has changed, now I like the way it’s done here, in the United States” (Nikolai, RFE IS). Additionally, students said that they felt like studying in Russia was harder for them, because professors “expect more from you” (Natalia, RFE IS).

All my responders were undergraduate students at UAA and in Russia and they stated that teaching methods at UAA tend to be more objective and the role of a teacher is perceived differently: “Teachers let you study on your own, basically. They are just there to help <...> and tell you what is wrong.” From students’ perspective, discipline methods and class rules at UAA also tend to be more technical and impersonal: “If you are late, it’s minus that many points, you are this – it’s minus these many points,’ you know. So just don’t understand the point of being like a robot, you know” (Adjunct Professor of Japanese, Dr. Alexander Salov). Ultimately, some responders concluded that teaching position in the United States is “just a job” like any other and teachers tend to separate their professional life from their personal life: “Many of the teachers are oriented like this: I am teaching from like 5:30 to 7:30, after this it’s my life, I don’t care about this. If we meet on a street – I don’t know you” (Adjunct Professor of Japanese, Dr. Alexander Salov).

IS were willing to recognize pros and cons of such objective teaching style and testing methods. On the one hand, according to students, in the U.S., tests prevent from “having bias opinion” or preferences and “everyone is equal, and everybody gets the same test. The computer will tell you the numbers.” On the other hand, in Russia there are “more talks”:

Every time you go on an exam or on a daily basis, it’s more like a professor

randomly say your name, you stand up and you talk. That's how they evaluate you. When you verbally talking to a professor, it's easier to explain what you know with different perspectives, different ways, different examples. Test, you know, you are talking to a computer, you cannot give your deep response, that's what I don't like. (Nikolai, RFE IS)

Along with teaching styles, students pointed to differences in schedule settings. Responders shared that in Russia, the schedule for the academic year was set up for them by the school administration. While at UAA they basically had to construct schedule on their own and decide what classes they need to take, which wasn't always convenient. According to Viktoria,

Sometime there were two classes in the morning, and then the only choice I can take is the class that is at 6 P.M. And it's like, okay, what am I doing these four hours? It takes longer. Otherwise, honestly, people would graduate faster here if they have a schedule like we had in Russia, definitely. (Viktoria, RFE IS)

Also, back in Russia, according to students, they had the same group of people that they studied with from the day one until graduation which helped them to feel more connected and enabled to build better friendship. While in the United States they had different group of people in every class. IS claimed that they regret that they cannot have similar experience of reuniting with their college peers every year like their parents do.

[In Russia] After graduation people meet every year. My mom still attends such meetings, though she graduated over 20 years ago. Here in America, it's a different

group of people every class. It's like socialism vs. individualism. (Tatiana, RFE IS)

Though IS referred to some differences as negative ones, they also admitted that American college with its scheduling system and long breaks is more flexible because it allows more balance between work, school and personal life.

I like that here you study for 4 days and have a long summer and winter break, so you can travel. It's nice. In Russia, we were studying a full 5 days and summer break was much shorter. I also liked that here you can choose your classes and can mix school and work. (Tatiana, RFE IS)

It was interesting to note that from students' perspective, the goal of education in the United States is also different compared to Russia. For instance, Natalia shared that "in America, they teach you how to achieve things, 'how to jump higher,' how to establish networking and how to collaborate with others. This system teaches you to contribute and to collaborate, so you can gain your profit later in life" (Natalia, RFE IS). Meanwhile in Russia, educators try to give students a comprehensive knowledge and make them learn basics of chemistry, literature, mathematics, physics, foreign language, geography, etc. In other words, the goal of education in Russia, from responders' perspective, is wide area of thought and erudition in various areas of knowledge. If the American school system teaches students how to learn and think critically, how to succeed in a society, the Russian system gives them what they need to know, how to think broadly and how to be a well-educated citizen.

### *6.2.1.3 Challenges*

Studies presented in the literature review section showed that many IS reported having challenges related to language barrier, lack of comprehension, feeling lost and left out. Isolation and failure to form friendships with local students was another challenge. Solvic (2008) suggested that IS need more opportunities for integration and interactions with local students in order to overcome a sense of fear and isolation and to feel a part of a larger community and increase their capacity to express themselves effectively. Similarly, most UAA IS claimed experiencing language barriers, time-consuming acculturation process and adjustment to a new environment: “When I just arrived, it was hard for me to understand everything in English. I felt disconnected from other peers in my classes. Of course, I missed my family a lot. I was on a phone with my parents almost every day.” (Natalia, RFE IS). Can such behavior be attributed to a homesickness or to a cultural shock? In my view, these two experiences (homesickness and cultural shock) are tightly interconnected, and severe homesickness in the beginning may be a result of cultural shock. As we learned from the literature review, “losing all familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse” increases human anxiety and results in a cultural shock (Oberg, 1960, p. 177). In the context of international education, the notion of cultural shock refers to a set of psychological and mental experiences occurring during transition from one cultural setting onto another that negatively impacts student’s sociocultural adaptation (Presbitero, 2016). This is what we see in this and following examples.

Russian students shared experiencing cultural barriers followed by cultural differences such as language, difference in cultural norms, values, social expectations and misunderstanding of American jokes. Due to these factors, their socialization in a new

environment also became a challenge and they shared feeling lonely, alienated, and disconnected from the rest of UAA community in the beginning.

Sometimes I didn't understand jokes, it was a struggle for me at first <...> Oh, the language. It was definitely a language barrier. I even took like public speaking online, which is kind of really weird, but it worked for me. But yeah, it was definitely a language barrier. I couldn't even like talk, speak with people. Especially like in classes, because I was like, 'oh they gonna judge me.' Because either accent or I am gonna say something wrong. (Ludmila, RFE IS)

All students reported experiencing financial problems while studying at UAA. The main reason for that was economic situation back in Russia during that time. Beginning from 2014, the Russian ruble collapsed due to political crisis in a region and international sanctions against Russia. For example, in 2014, the ruble declined to as low as 80 to one U.S. dollar, compared to 30 rubles to one U.S. dollar prior to the crisis. For Russian IS and their families paying school tuition in U.S. dollars this meant that their expenses more than doubled in a short period of time. In addition to that, the median salary in a Far East region remained the same and ranged between 400 and 500 U.S. dollars per month. There is no doubt that all these factors put a lot of financial and emotional stress on many IS. As a result, many responders shared experiencing difficulties with finding low-cost housing, means of transportation, lack of financial aid opportunities, and lack of adequate support with legal matters on behalf of the university: "It's hard to pay for such tuition when still in Russia equivalent of paychecks are different. Over there we get payed less. So, parents were little bit struggling paying for a school" (Viktoria, RFE IS). Some responders shared to feel somewhat

limited without vehicle and a good bus system in Anchorage, which became a big inconvenience for many of them: “Without a car you are really limited here to a couple of expensive stores on the UAA grounds” (Adjunct Professor of Japanese, Dr. Alexander Salov).

#### *6.2.1.4 Self-determined motivations and successful practices*

Now, let’s take a look at what helped students from RFE to overcome these challenges, what contributed to their cultural adaptation and motivated them to stay on track and ultimately succeed in a new environment. The majority of IS said that a “big international community, inspiring professors, and other students being supportive” helped them the most during their time at UAA (Viktora, RFE IS). Studies in the literature review also show that “assistance from other international students or friends with similar cultural background,” group projects and acculturation through mutual holidays celebration were amongst successful practices that helped IS to overcome academic and social challenges (Rabia & Karkouti, 2017, p. 353). Similarly, some of my responders stated that:

The community here [in Anchorage] helped me, because I found out there is a huge community of Russian people here. So yeah, became friends with them. We were celebrating Thanksgiving with them, Christmas, they were always inviting us to their houses. (Ludmila, RFE IS)

According to research findings presented in the literature review section, self-determined motivation to study abroad relates to culture shock and subjective well-being of IS (Yang, Zhang, & Sheldon, 2018). The study found that “self-determined students are better prepared to engage in social activities and build connections” in the foreign situation, also they are more

likely to satisfy basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) and to avoid negative effects of culture shock compared to those students who had controlled motivations (Yang, Zhang, & Sheldon, 2018, p. 97-100).

IS also showed that their success was driven by internal motivations and claim to be working “extra hard” to achieve their goals: “100% concentration. Always. I realized that I have to work harder than my American peers to get a good job. Because of my language and my status. Eventually, I want to write a book about it.” (Natalia, RFE IS). Further, in their interview responses, IS revealed some other self-determined motivations that helped their cultural adaptation, such as finding a job on campus, joining other social clubs, sharing their culture, and opening a Russian Club at UAA helped their own adaptation and acculturation and benefited many others: “We opened Russian Club, so we can have another students coming, they don’t have to struggle” (Ludmila, RFE IS). Such attitudes can also be interpreted as the process of self-determination in students trying to compete and thrive in a new environment.

#### *6.2.1.5 Cultural diplomacy.*

One of my personal greatest findings in the interview and research process was the realization that IS also play an important role in promoting cultural diplomacy when they live and study abroad. As defined by the U.S. Department of State, cultural diplomacy is “the exchange of ideas, information, art, and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding” (U.S. Department of State, 2005, p. 4). Often unknowingly, student cultural ambassadors deconstruct certain ethnic stereotypes and improve cross-cultural dialogue and understanding through education. So, some participants



shared with me that while at UAA they realized American culture has a big influence on a Russian daily life and that there is need for promoting educational exchange between Russia and the United States. By sharing their personal stories of living and studying in Alaska, IS are helping UAA to perform the outreach and to promote studies in Alaska internationally.

American culture is very popular in Russia <...> I have started my blog on Instagram and YouTube about two years ago. I started sharing my experience of living in Alaska as an IS. It was mostly for a Russian audience. Now, I am thinking about starting a blog about life in Russia for my American friends. (Natalia, RFE IS)

It appears that not many Americans consider Russia as a place to study and they are not going on exchange programs to Russia, compared to Russian students going to the United States. In their responses, IS shared the attempt to reinforce this tendency and trying “to promote Russia as a safe, not expensive place to study. There are many universities in Russia that offer a great quality of education. Russia is very unique in many ways. Just like English, the Russian language unites Europe and Asia” (Natalia, RFE IS).

Akli (2012) thinks that studying abroad develops some critical diplomatic skills in students, such as ability to listen and be empathetic with others, ability to dispel stereotypes through action, and living overseas gives a proficiency in a foreign language. All these soft diplomatic actions in a daily life in a foreign country overlap and “consolidate the foundation for future global citizens” involving acquisition of “global awareness, world learning and affective development” (Akli, 2012, p. 46). The Russian Club on UAA campus created by Russian IS, is a great example of developing soft skills and cultural diplomacy in action. IS shared that one of the reasons to open a Russian Club on campus was creating a safe space for

all foreign students, and the other reason was the need to have a platform for cultural exchange and open discussions about propaganda and its role in international relations, especially in Russian-American relations, and to find common ground for a cultural dialogue.

Of course, there is a lot of propaganda in Russia against America. But after I came to the United States, I saw that the situation here is not much better. I feel like Russia is being presented as a militaristic, cold, aggressive and rude nation. In a movie, for example, Russia like stuck in 90-s, with its criminals, drug trafficking, and post-Cold War feeling. My main motivation was to tell people about modern Russia, and how much we really have in common. For instance, fashion. I found that people here have a lot of interest to Russian culture, and particularly to history. So, I basically wanted to tell the Russian story, share a story of modern Russian generation. (Natalia, RFE IS)

#### *6.2.1.6 Applications and suggestions to the UAA administration.*

Housing and transportation. While overall RFE IS reported to be happy with their experience at UAA, they shared some suggestions and recommendations that can help UAA to improve the environment for the future IS. First of all, students pointed out that the university needs to pay more attention to a living situation of the IS, providing more information regarding affordable housing options and organizing means of transportation to major shopping centers (at least once a week).

It would be nice to have different opportunities where to live. Nobody told me that I can live in other places except the dorm. Dorm was expensive. And as I said, especially when the ruble [the national currency of Russia] value dropped, it became twice expensive for me to pay. It would help me a lot to

know that I have other opportunities. So, what I would advise to do, is when somebody comes to the airport, meet them, you know, put them on a bus, bring them on campus, show them around, explain other different options. That would be really helpful for students, in my view. (Nikolai, RFE IS)

Communication and support for IS. All responders expressed the need to enhance the communication and support for IS on behalf of the university and suggested bringing more international advisors trained how to address needs of this specific group of students.

Student advisor at UAA, he was not bad, don't get me wrong. But I feel like there should be more communication between student advisor, or he needs to have like helpers checking emails. Because there are many international students and sometimes, he will not response for like a few days, because he is going through all his mails. (Viktoria, RFE IS)

I felt like they didn't care much about helping us and that was hard for me. Other people, like my friends, for example, they helped me much more than people who supposed to be doing that as part of their job. So, I would be maybe recommending to do more training on that subject. (Nikolai, RFE IS)

Response team. Another suggestion touched upon the creation of special response team on campus. According to students, the need for such team is dictated by the necessity to have someone who would be in charge of all international enrollees and provide them with necessary support regarding their rights and responsibilities, offer informative workshops on

legal matters, conduct trainings on how to file taxes in America, write resume, and find Optional Practical Training [henceforth, OPT] and internships.

University should do a better job helping international students to get their internships or OPT. Because it was highly advertised to us in Russia, and here I had to find everything myself. No one helped me. (Tatiana, RFE IS)

I wish they can have a person who would be in charge of international students here at UAA. Like helping them with resume, telling them about the housing options, jobs, and OPT. (Natalia, RFE IS).

Predeparture information. IS stated that they would feel more prepared for a transition to a new place if they received a comprehensive information packages about life in Alaska and in Anchorage. This would reduce some negative aspects of cultural shock and provide useful tips about features of the place: “The life for students in Vladivostok is very different than life here. There is not much nightlife or entertainment, no city life, everything is far to travel to” (Tatiana, RFE IS).

Events for IS. Another wish expressed by IS was to organize more events targeting international student community. While UAA offered a variety of activities on campus, few of them were relevant to IS and sometimes IS weren’t even aware that these events are taking place. Therefore, IS asked to increase the outreach, especially to the international audience.

Reach out to students more. Because if I didn’t go to David Racki [UAA IS advisor] directly, I don’t think I would be having this support. Because I was doing everything by myself. I was in my freshmen year and I literally stayed in my room. Maybe reach

out to people, especially to IS. (Ludmila, RFE IS)

#### **6.2.1.7 Summary**

Student responses showed that American professors tend to establish objective and professional relationships with their students which may appear to IS as ‘carrying less’ and being impersonal, yet students eventually realize that ultimate goal of American education is to teach how to learn, how to think critically, to be independent and cooperate member of society. Meanwhile in Russia, student-professor relationships are tighter, even somewhat ‘obsessive,’ as described by some IS. Professors in Russia have more control over their students and perform not only as academic mentors, but also to certain extent as life coaches. This difference appeared to be frustrating for many students in the beginning and contributed to the overall experience of cultural shock. However, later students learned how to adapt to a new norms and social expectations and felt comfortable in a new system.

Similarly, in the beginning, the self-constructed schedule of the American system emerged as a burden for IS. However, after students had a chance to adapt, they claimed that such schedule allowed them to have more control over their school, personal life, and work. Students admit that they could have benefited from some type of training or orientation in the beginning of their studying at UAA. It would ease the transition from the Russian school system and help to comprehend new rules and requirements better.

It is also very important to note that interview responses demonstrated that IS are playing a role of cultural diplomats while they are studying abroad. Through their academic and personal relationships, they carry an important mission of bringing countries and their people closer, dispel myths and propaganda reinforced by politicians and media. RFE IS are

great representation of modern young Russian society that is free from a Cold War background, progressive and flexible, open to the world, and acknowledge the place of American culture in Russian daily life.

### **6.2.2 Part II: Perspectives of UAA Administration and Faculty**

Since these participants are in a position of public authority and they agreed to be identified, I am using their real names. The first participant is UAA Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Dr. Bruce Schultz, and second participant is UAA Adjunct Professor of Japanese language Dr. Alexander Salov who also used to be an IS from the RFE at UAA back in early 2000s.

#### *6.2.2.1 General situation.*

To describe the current situation with IS on campus, the Vice Chancellor of UAA used the word “flat,” “stagnant,” and a “period of low enrollment:” “We used to have 400 plus IS at UAA, and I don’t think those numbers are that high at all anymore” (UAA Vice Chancellor, Dr. Schultz). Dr. Salov also estimated current situation as “very bad, compared to what it used to be. We are losing a lot of IS”. Today, the university hosts about 2 students from the RFE per semester, compared to 25-30 (Adjunct Professor of Japanese, Dr. Alexander Salov).

#### *6.2.2.2 Reasons and Consequences of low enrollment.*

During the interview, both of my responders confirmed that UAA used to have special programs established with the RFE universities. Due to this special partnership, IS had an opportunity to study abroad at lower tuition rates and to receive a dual diploma (meaning that upon graduation, a student could receive a Russian and American college diplomas). About 10 years ago, UAA had successfully operated American-Russian Center on campus. However,

these programs as well as American-Russian Center are no longer in place, and currently, UAA doesn't have plans to renew them. According to Dr. Shultz, "one of the factors was taking the consideration that there were very few if any UAA students that were going to Russia. And so, what was intended to be a mutual exchange program, our students weren't benefited from the opportunity of going to Russia" (UAA Vice Chancellor, Dr. Schultz). Additionally, Dr. Schultz made a general note naming the safety concerns and gun violence as one of the reasons for the declining interest from international students to study in the United States.

Dr. Salov made an assumption that current drop in IS enrollments could be related to the fact that UAA didn't renew old agreements with Russian universities and is not currently looking for a new opportunity to attract IS.

The agreement between universities in Russia like in Magadan, Khabarovsk, Vladivostok, they just didn't renew them. So that's why the people are not coming. Same thing about Korean students. We used to have a program with the University of Incheon, and now it's not operating anymore. So, not the lack of agreements is the main reason for the decrease of IS, but the lack of enthusiasm on behalf of the university. (Adjunct Professor of Japanese, Dr. Alexander Salov).

#### *6.2.2.3 Faculty, stuff and resources.*

In order to grow and sustain enrollments of IS, the university must have well-developed support services, resources, dedicated staff and faculty members able to address the needs of these students. Addressing the situation with the support for UAA current and future IS, Vice Chancellor stated:

The level of support that we are able to provide, we are providing to international population tends to come and go depending on what stuff we have and what faculty we have to work on that. We went through really large internationalization maybe 8 or 10 years ago, trying to learn as faculty and staff all that we could about the best ways to support internationalization for students.

It appears that UAA had a successful experience of hosting IS in the past and had a well-maintained international center and exchange programs. However, today, “if that was a priority for the university, we would do that. We just going through so many budget reductions that it’s making it more difficult for us to identify that is as a priority” (UAA Vice Chancellor, Dr. Schultz). Therefore, in this situation of budget reductions, the university makes a decision that domestic students come first.

#### *6.2.2.4 Value of international students on campus.*

While the university experiences a significant decrease in international enrolments, both administration and faculty recognize the value and importance of international presence on campus.

We hear from faculty, we hear from student leaders in a Student Government that they appreciate having IS. And our student president last year was an IS. And I believe that having IS in a classroom, we very much appreciate what perspectives IS bring. It is absolutely a value. (UAA Vice Chancellor, Dr. Schultz)

Indeed, the role of IS on campus is hard to overestimate. Since for most students studying abroad is the first international experience, they tend to form very unique and strong



relationships with the place and become “friends of Alaska and friends of the United States.”

I know one guy who graduated from UAA. He is Japanese. He has a successful business in Japan. He is trying to establish business connections between Alaska and Japan. The only reason he is doing it is because he likes Alaska. When he was 18 years old he came here and spent several years of his life at UAA. And I think it's super valuable. Not only the international students bring money personally, I know a person who studied here in the late 90s, and he sent his children to study here as well (Adjunct Professor of Japanese, Dr. Alexander Salov).

Both responders also noted that IS are “helping the statistics” of the university. While many domestic students tend to take “101, 102, 201, 202 classes here [at UAA] and then go to some other university,” IS arriving to study at UAA “actually finish their degree. They stay” (Adjunct Professor of Japanese, Dr. Alexander Salov). The graduation rate statistics tracked by the University of Alaska Anchorage only support these statements. The latest data shows that from 1,006 (100%) individuals entered UAA in 2012 as first-time, full-time, baccalaureate degree-seeking students, only 316 (31.4%) had earned their degrees at UAA (UAA, Institutional Effectiveness, 2019b). This 6-year completion rate is the highest achieved at UAA since the institution began tracking this measure in 1999. While UAA’s rate has improved compared to previous years and is the highest achieved by the university since 1999, it remains low. Currently, UAA set a goal to raise the graduation rate up to 35% by 2025 (please see Figure 10).

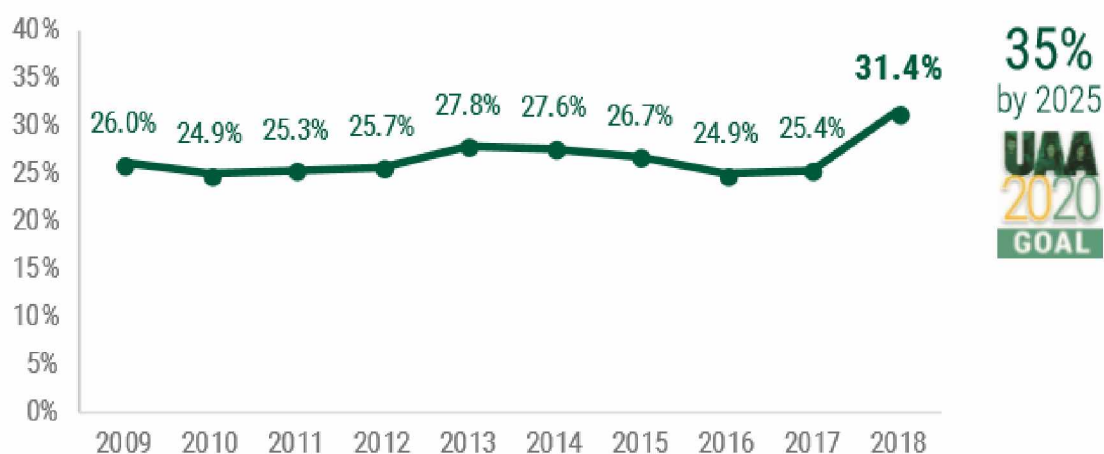


Figure 10: 6-year Baccalaureate graduation rate AY18 at UAA (UAA, Institutional Effectiveness, 2019b)

Meanwhile, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), in the academic year of 2017, nationwide, about 60% of undergraduate students complete their degrees at the same institutions within the same period of time. Again, this data supports the fact that IS are improving the statistics of the university.

#### *6.2.3.5 Motivations and needs of international students.*

Cross-cultural studies examined in the literature review showed that motivations of foreign students to graduate and to succeed are stronger than those students living in the area (Kazakova & Shastina, 2019). While local students maintaining their usual way of life have searched for inner motivations, foreign students experience higher mental and physical discomfort, which strengthens their motivation in achieving their outer goals. In the course of interview, both responders have confirmed that motivations and needs of IS are different from domestic students.

IS demonstrate greater resilience than many domestic students. Being so far away from home, not having family support, not having as many peer supports, yet, their persistence and their desire to complete an education is very-very strong. (UAA Vice Chancellor, Dr. Schultz)

On my question if there are any differences in students' motivations and needs based on their country of origin, responders stated that from their experience, motivations and needs of IS from different countries are very similar when they arrive to study and live abroad. These students tend to have similar goal and concerns.

Motivations and needs of IS are similar. I think IS from Korea and from Russia, when they are there at UAA, they probably have similar goals and similar concerns. English is the problem. And usually when you are that young and it's the first experience for you to leave your family living by yourself, makes it a little bit more challenging. I think those are common things. And the other, depending on the family of course, whether you need money, or you don't need money, work becomes an issue. (Adjunct Professor of Japanese, Dr. Alexander Salov)

Overall, the cross-cultural research and responses of RFE students showed that academically mobile students tend to demonstrate a higher level of emotional and personal maturity, just as the literature review showed (Duranczyk & Pincherskaia, 2018). Similarly, in the case with UAA, we find more evidence that IS arriving to study in Alaska are guided by strong self-determining intrinsic motivations on their way to academic and social success in a new country.

#### *6.2.3.6 Support for international students.*

Based on the interview responses, I conclude that UAA is lacking a common strategic framework regarding IS. As of today, UAA has a Multicultural Center and office of International Student Services (ISS) on campus. However, these offices don't "come together to conversation or understanding of who is doing what," they are understaffed and not funded well, so, "the level of support that they can provide isn't to a degree that they could." (UAA Vice Chancellor, Dr. Schultz). As far as support for English language learners, UAA offers mentors and writing labs where sophomore students and sometimes college instructors for whom English is a native language can proofread students' papers and explain grammatic and semantic errors.

In the course of my research I also learned that about 10 years ago, the university had very strong ISS department, which was in charge of recruiting, enrolling, and supporting IS throughout their academic journey in Alaska. The department was conducting outreach and worked on establishing agreements between UAA and foreign universities.

They [UAA Enrollment Services Representatives] actually went to target markets and participated in educational conferences. The last effort that I can remember was the U.S. Consulate General in Vladivostok doing some recruitment effort. The Consul General actually came to Anchorage and learned more about the University while staying here. (Adjunct Professor of Japanese, Dr. Alexander Salov)

Currently, the U.S. Consulate General still expresses a lot of interest to exchange programs between Alaska and the RFE. Similarly, in Russia and in other countries like South Korea, students and school administrations are looking for the opportunities to participate in

exchange programs and to study in the United States. However, according to Dr. Salov, UAA doesn't express enough interest in supporting these initiatives.

I don't see any effort by UAA at all <...> Maybe the administration doesn't care anymore. I know it from the experience of working with Korean students. I remember when the University of Incheon officials came here to renew the partnership agreement. Basically, at that point in time, there was another fiscal crisis at the University. The administration here said that it's great, but, you know, we don't have enough staff to work with you. However, the director of the international program in my former school in Khabarovsk, Russia, contacted me directly because she knew that I am working here, and asked if I can help to find out what is going on with students' visas and why UAA side is not responding. She was like 'Okay. Can you help me?' I forwarded her message to someone at the Enrollment Services who dealt with international students and that she was working with, but, in the end, there was no response. As a result, a group of Russian students from Khabarovsk never came to UAA. It's just like nobody cares. (Adjunct Professor of Japanese, Dr. Alexander Salov)

#### **6.2.3.7 Summary**

In conclusion to these in-depth interviews with RFE IS and UAA administration, I came to realize that the majority of IS list the lack of adequate support and communication between International Student Services office at UAA and universities back in Russia as one of the main issues. It appears that old Memoranda of Agreements between the RFE universities and UAA are no longer in place and those IS who came to study while agreements were active, are

now left on their own. The International Student Services office and IS advisor at UAA are the only points of contact for these students. The faculty member who taught Russian language and literature at UAA and who was one of the most helpful points of contact for Russian speaking students (as it follows from the interview responses), has left the UAA in 2016 and moved to Astana, Kazakhstan for a new job at Nazarbayev University. One of the IS advisors at UAA shared that “in the past we [UAA] have had a good relationship with students from Far East Russia; however, in the past few years, these numbers have dwindled significantly (over 70%) due to the ending of institutional agreements and the graduation of students” (from the email correspondence with UAA IS advisor). Due to the unique needs of IS and legal requirements, no other advisors or centers on campus can support them effectively. However, the international advisors state that even they have “limited access” to these students and their primary responsibility to these students “is visa paperwork and dealings with the U.S. government” (from email correspondence with UAA IS advisor).

While UAA administration acknowledges the importance of globalization and internationalization of the university, they have to state that currently, international enrollments are not the priority for the school. These days, the University of Alaska is facing some major challenges related to budget cuts and restructuring and simply does not have enough human resources to maintain old agreements and to establish new ones. In order for UAA to grow international student’s enrollment, the university needs to have a better internal coordination and effort of support among faculty and staff so every knows its role in working towards larger experience. Also, the university needs to bring in some additional financial and human resources in order to reorganize and restructure the international sector on campus. The current situation with the budget reductions dictates its own priorities, but at the same time, the

increase of international student body may have a direct impact on the economic situation of the university and help to raise the graduation statistics.

### **6.3 Limitations**

There were several limitations for this study. First, not all participants were residing in Anchorage, AK at the time they were conducted. Due to the F-1 visa status, some participants have already left the United States and returned back to Russia. Some participants obtained OPT, temporary employment related to an F-1 student's major area of study outside of Alaska (USCIS, 2018). However, I was able to reach out to RFE students who were outside of Anchorage, AK via the phone, emails, and social media.

Seconds, the surveys were distributed to a small selection of participants (21 participant), which gives somewhat limited information about the IS' experience at the UAA as a whole.

Third, UAA is the only institution selected for this study. The data of this study could be richer if selected participants represented different countries, had different levels of proficiency in English, and different socioeconomic background.

However, the focus of my study was specifically on experiences of RFE IS studying at UAA, and it was my goal to research this particular population group at particular place. In order to obtain somewhat more comprehensive and broader picture regarding the situation with other IS in Alaska, further research is needed.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Conclusions**

If we seek to understand people, we have to try to put ourselves, as far as we can, in that particular historical and cultural background. One has to recognize that whatever the future may hold, countries and people differ in their approach to life and their ways of living and thinking. In order to understand them, we have to use their language as far as we can, not language in the narrow sense of the word, but the language of the mind. That is one necessity.

– Jawahar Lal Nehru (Adler, 1991, p. 64)

In the era of globalization, we are inevitably heading towards global citizenship. The global market economy, space technology, and international research efforts vanish borders and limitations allowing us to see the world as one comprehensive whole. It also requires a collective effort to find solutions to global threats, such as climate change or cure of some deadly viruses and diseases. As globalization forces humanity to look for answers to various environmental, humanitarian and security questions, it also brings an opportunity for people to understand each other's perspectives and motives better, and to improve cross-cultural communication and collaboration.

The role of IS in these global processes is second to none. In the course of this research I was able to reveal evidence that IS are cultural and educational diplomats who carry the important mission of bringing countries and their people closer, as well as dispel myths and propaganda reinforced by political campaigns and media. The focus group of this study, the



RFE IS, became a great representation of modern Russian society. These students demonstrated an unquestionable level of freedom from the Cold War tensions and demonstrated an ability to think critically, to be progressive and flexible in their ability to adapt to a new culture. The research showed, IS have a strong sense of understanding of the globalizing world and they recognize the need for collaborative problem-solving. Some students shared a belief that “in a globalizing world, problems become global too. So, they need to be addressed mutually. And I see the value of having international students on campuses. They are like a bridge between Russia and America” (Natalia, RFE IS). The RFE students recognize the place of American culture in Russian daily life by stating that American culture is very popular in Russia and has a significant impact through fashion, music, and the movie industry.

In this study I aimed to answer three major questions: 1) What motivates IS from the RFE to pursue their higher education in the United States, at the UAA? 2) How do RFE IS describe their experience at the UAA? 3) How can UAA better address the needs of these students? In the course of my survey and in-depth interview inquiry, I was able to find answers to these questions. It appeared that among the main factors that motivate students from the RFE to pursue higher education in the United States were:

- the high quality of education and international recognition of the American diploma;
- a chance to experience new ways of living and acting in the field of study;
- an ability to improve English skills;
- an opportunity to build international network and to secure a potential career abroad.

Over the 90% of IS stated that special programs established between their home

universities and the UAA as well as unique agreements sustaining a lower tuition rate (according to 76% of responders) were the main reason for deciding to pursue a college degree in Alaska. Amongst the main challenges IS named:

- the language barrier;
- the lack of communication between universities in Russia and the UAA, and ultimate discontinuation of agreements between institutions;
- financial difficulties;
- complicated visa process and lack of legal support on behalf of international advisors.

However, good friendships and constant support from other foreign students on campus, caring professors, and community involvement helped my participants to overcome academic and social obstacles. The findings of my research are similar to the literature review (Aldawsari, Adams, & Grimes, 2018). My research confirmed that

- the construct of autonomy,
- self-realization and psychological growth,
- employment abroad,
- community support,
- and self-determined motivations to succeed in a foreign country

were the driving factors helping Russian IS to overcome academic challenges, the sense of loneliness and cultural isolation, and to successfully adjust to a new environment. It is also interesting to note that in addition to academic, IS form bounding-type relationships through

common experiences when they spend time together and participate in local events. These relationships extend throughout their lives and create a successful platform for cross-cultural collaboration, international travel, and business development. Therefore, relationships established by IS carry characteristics of cosmopolitanism and help to elevate prejudices, bring people towards empathy and understanding, wash away the sense of unknown, foreign, and “the Other” through education.

Now, I will visualize my findings by revisiting and adapting the push-pull theory of migration (Lee, 1966). On the left, you may see the ‘pull’ factors that attracted and motivated IS to pursue their degrees in the U.S., at UAA. On the right, you may see the challenging and demotivating ‘push’ factors that appeared as obstacles for the RFE IS (please see Figure 11).

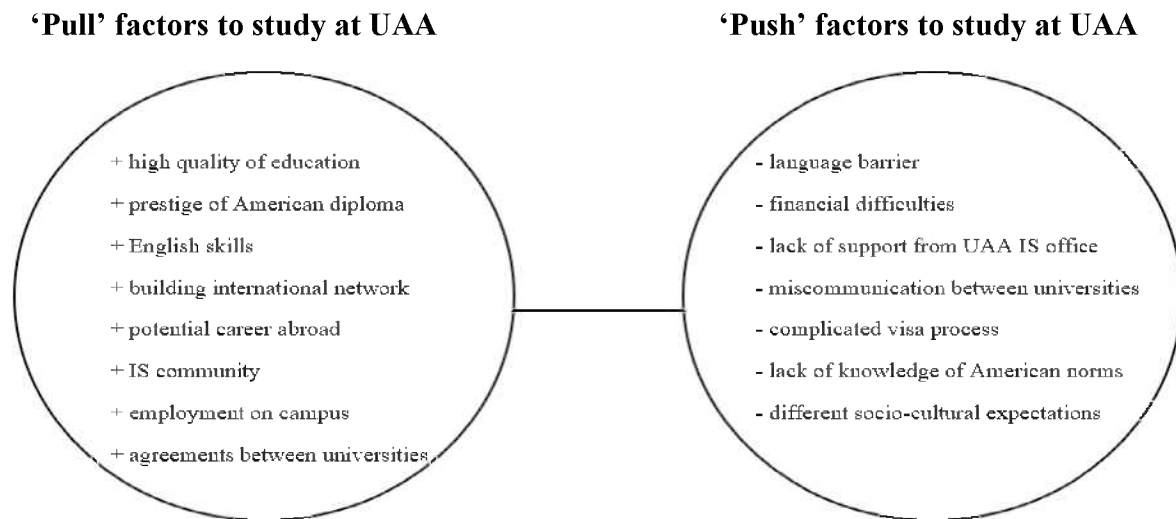


Figure 11: Push-pull factors to study at UAA

The experiences and challenges of IS are somewhat similar to experiences of Native students in a sense that both groups are forced to find their “home away from home” (Tachine, Cabrera & Bird, 2017) and to create a safe place in a midst of change. The

literature review and findings of my study bring a doubtless testimony that just like the formation of Native Center on campus helped Native students with their self-determination, sense of belonging and contributed to their ultimate social and academic success, the American-Russian Center previously operating at UAA, was a valuable space for students' social comfort, cultural validation, legal and logistic assistance. As of today, UAA abolished work of American-Russian Center despite the demand. Currently, there is no funding, coordination or university personnel available to support and maintain this effort. The present Russian Club on UAA campus is a sole initiative of Russian students and their attempt to meet the need for a safe space and cultural exchange. There is a strong evidence that the university should bring attention and proper resources to the reformation of existing International Student Office and to create coordinated cultural centers for IS on campus to better meet unique needs of students with similar cultural background. From my personal experience of being a foreign student in Alaska and based on my research discovery, I conclude that such small cultural islands (centers) may help to address a larger necessity for inclusion and diversity of the UAA community. Cultural centers will not only enable IS to overcome a sense of fear and isolation but also will help them to better integrate into campus life, to build successful relationships with local peers through sharing own culture, and to become a part of a larger community.

While this is a challenging time for the University of Alaska trying to cope with budget reductions and to maintain accreditation, it is also important to undertake well-defined steps towards internationalization of campus. Opening up to partnerships and exchanges between UAA and other foreign universities may not only help UAA to stay afloat, but also to sail in international waters of ideas and to be a valuable participant in Arctic discourse. Although

UAA administration agrees on the importance and benefits of presence of IS on campus, there is no real effort, support or adequate resources to address their needs. Budget reductions in Alaska might have a long-lasting domino effect and have even more impactful consequences that were foreseen initially. Budget cuts impact not only domestic students, causing closure of existing programs, faculty and staff reduction, but they also take away the opportunity to present Alaska on international arena and to establish valuable bonds and partnerships with other countries. International education not only expands perspectives for young professionals, it also creates a unique favorable atmosphere for the state economy. The research showed that, in fact, IS are agents of economic development who desire to give back upon graduation and to maintain relationships with this place (Alaska) through business or through education of own children.

## **7.1 Implications**

The experience of studying and living abroad should be studied simultaneously since students' academic achievements and their overall wellbeing are tightly connected. This research can potentially have much broader applications and revealed data can serve as “best practices” for addressing the needs of other foreign students, expanding research efforts in the Pacific Rim, and promote studies at the University of Alaska internationally.

In the course of my research inquiry with the IS, I found out that UAA doesn't have any sort of Exit survey for these students where they could share their thoughts, reflect upon their experiences at UAA or to give a constructive feedback to the university. Therefore, I would like to offer the university to employ the Questionnaire (please see Appendix A) as an Exit survey for IS graduating from the University of Alaska Anchorage.

I hope that the information revealed through this qualitative inquiry will enable UAA administration to understand the critical need for college internalization in the light of global processes and to ensure an adequately support for the current and future IS. Current study may also inform ongoing outreach efforts to IS and to improve recruitment practices. Additionally, findings of this work can be used in a future research focused on international exchange and cross-cultural communication between Alaska and RFE distressed by economic and political sanctions.

## **7.2 Future research**

In a globalizing world, the process of foreign training becomes an important part and valuable tool of internationalization (Kazakova & Shastina, 2019). An increasing number of IS around the world results in a growing need for research related to IS and academic migrants (Aldawsarip, Adams, & Grimes, 2018). In the light of these events, how do we best develop an education recognizing global learning and exchange over the pursuit of national interests?

The necessity to understand the political, social, psychological, and economic factors that influence the mobility of foreign students is growing. Multi-country studies presented in the literature review along with survey and interview findings, provided a good evidence that host governments and their higher education institutions must consider the unique needs of IS and to see a value of international presence on campus and in the country. This study targeted a narrow group of participants and attempted to identify and document their motivations, challenges and overall experiences at UAA. Further research is highly important since there is no current inquiry addressing the needs and experiences of IS at UAA available.

The importance of internalization and implementation of some cosmopolitan ideas already become explicit in local Anchorage communities through initiatives like Welcoming Anchorage, Sister City project, Alaska Institute for Justice, etc. The pursuit of global citizenship education model that teaches responsible consumption, decision making, empathy and leads beyond national interests giving a hope to find solutions to issues that endanger our environment and the world peace. The realization of this model is impossible without the diversity of our communities, without IS in our classrooms and exchange of knowledge and ideas.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A: Letter of Consent and Survey**

#### **University of Alaska Fairbanks**

#### **Russian Far East International Students at the University of Alaska Anchorage:**

#### **Aspirations, Motivations and Needs**

**IRB #:** 1497048-1

**Date Approved:** November 11, 2019

**Key Information:**

Dear participant,

My name is Anna Goldin. I am a graduate student at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Currently, I am pursuing my Master's degree in People, Place and Pedagogy. I am studying experiences of Russian Far East (RFE) international students (IS) at the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA). You are an IS from the RFE and you have studied at UAA. I am inviting you to participate in this research study by completing the attached survey/interview.

**Study Details:**

This survey is seeking your subjective perceptions. It will take about 15 minutes to complete. There is no compensation for responding nor is there any known risk. To ensure that all information is confidential, please DO NOT include your name, gender or age. Copies of the project will be provided to my college instructor. If you choose to participate in this project, please answer all questions as honestly as possible. After that, return the completed copy to SurveyMonkey or to my email [avponurkina@alaska.edu](mailto:avponurkina@alaska.edu). If you don't feel comfortable answering a particular question, you may skip it. Please note, your partaking is strictly voluntary and you may refuse to participate at any time. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss. If you decide to withdraw, please just let me know. You don't have to provide any explanation. Completion and return of the survey will indicate your willingness to participate in this study.

I want to thank you for taking your time to assist me in my academic endeavors.

This information will allow me to:

- 1) advise the UAA administration how to better assist IS just like you in the future;
- 2) improve communication between the UAA Office of International Students and UAA IS community;
- 3) inform the ongoing education outreach and foreign recruitment in the RFE.

The collected information will be coded and sent to my primary investigator Dr. Maureen Hogan (UAF). After that, we will save the data on a secure server. The data will be kept in Dr. Hogan's office at UAF in a locked place for five years. Dr. Maureen Hogan will be responsible for destroying the information after five years.

If you would like a summary copy of this study, please send a request by a separate email. If you require additional information or have questions, please contact me or Dr. Maureen Hogan:

Anna Goldin (907) 602-6817 or via email [avponurkina@alaska.edu](mailto:avponurkina@alaska.edu).

Maureen P. Hogan, Ph.D., (907) 474-647, [mphogan@alaska.edu](mailto:mphogan@alaska.edu).

If you don't like how this study was conducted, you may report complaints to the UAF School of Education. All complaints can be submitted anonymously to M.Ed. in People, Place and Pedagogy, by phone (907) 474-7341, or by email – [uaf-soe-school@alaska.edu](mailto:uaf-soe-school@alaska.edu).

The UAF Institutional Review Board (IRB) is a group that reviews research projects involving people. This review is done to protect the rights and welfare of the people involved in the research. If you have questions about your rights, you can contact the UAF Office of Research Integrity (IRB) at: 474-7800 (Fairbanks area) or 1-866-876-7800 (toll-free outside the Fairbanks area); [uaf-irb@alaska.edu](mailto:uaf-irb@alaska.edu).

Statement of Consent:

I am 18 years or older. I understand the information presented to me. My questions are answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this study. I am offered a copy of this form.

---

Signature of Participant & Date

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Signature of Person Obtaining Consent & Date

## Survey

**1. Where are you from?**

**2. What is your gender & age?**

**3. When did you attend UAA (years)?**

**4. What was your highest educational degree and main activity prior to study in the U.S?**

- Pupil at secondary school;
- Student on an undergraduate course program;
- Student on a postgraduate course program;
- Employed;
- Unemployed/seeking employment;
- Other status

**5. What was your major at UAA?**



**6. What was your source of funding when you studied at UAA? (Check all that apply)**

- Parents, relatives;
- Own money (work, savings, etc.);
- Home country grants/scholarships;
- U.S. grants/ scholarships;
- Student loan;
- Other sources of funding

--

**7. Did you come as an independent student or as an exchange student in a group?**

- Organized exchange/joint degree program
- Individual student

**8. What factors motivated you to study in the United States? (Check all that apply)**

- The quality of higher education is excellent and internationally recognized
- Specialize in an area which is not offered in the home country
- Get a broader and more flexible education than offered in home country
- Improve my English proficiency
- Have access to specific internships and practices not available in home country
- Experience new ways of thinking and acting in the field of study
- Improve career prospects and increase earning potential in the home country
- Interest in foreign culture, history, and landscape
- Opportunity to build network and secure potential career abroad (in the USA)
- Other factors

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**9. How did you learn about the opportunity to study at UAA?**

- Friends and family members studying at the UAA (or in the USA)
- Other international students studying in my home country
- Recommendations of professors at my home university
- University in my home country
- International student associations
- Education events and student fairs
- Internet research, blogs, TV, newspapers, magazines, etc.
- The U.S. Embassy and Consulates in my home country
- Other sources

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**10. What made you choose to study in Alaska and at the UAA? (Check all that apply)**

- Affordability of cost of living and tuition fees
- People of Anchorage are welcoming towards foreigners and people from different ethnic backgrounds
- Special programs between home university and the UAA
- Anchorage is a safe place to live and study
- Alaska has a rich history, culture and cultural heritage
- Alaskan landscape and geography is fascinating
- Other reasons

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**11. What was your greatest challenge when you studied at UAA? (Check all that apply)**

- Complicated visa procedures and strict legal requirements
- Difficulties with the recognition of credits and academic qualifications obtained in home country
- Difference in academic requirements and expectations
- Lack of agreements and communication between the home university and UAA
- Getting the financial resources for studying
- Limited English language proficiency
- Social exclusion from the UAA community as an international student
- Personal difficulties to stay far from home/ homesickness

**12. What has helped you the most and made your time at UAA more fulfilling?**

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**13. What services do you think should be offered to international students at UAA that are not currently being offered?**

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**14. What did you learn about the United States and Alaska that you didn't know before you came?**

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**15. Do you have any additional comments or suggestions regarding your experience as an international student at UAA?**

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## **Appendix B: In-depth Interview Questions for International Students**

(Timeline: approximately 30 minutes)

### While at UAA, have you experienced:

- Prejudices towards you as an international student from Russia by faculty and by other students or faculty or school administration?
- Different academic preparation, expectations and student-professor relationships?
- Loneliness due to lack of social network and cultural differences? Emotional difficulties?
- Financial, legal, or professional challenges?
- Lack of knowledge of student rights and resources on campus?
- Lack of confidence in speaking English?
  
- Did you find UAA environment and services being supportive to address your social and emotional needs?
- What helped to ease or avoid these situations, facilitate emotional tension, and to feel a part of the UAA community?

### Quality:

- Please reflect, overall, how did UAA assist you with the enrollment?
- Looking back, what information/assistance you wish you received during your enrollment to the UAA?
- How did UAA meet your academic expectations? Socio-cultural expectations? Professional development expectations?

### Summary:

- What could be done better? What would you change?
- Overall, have UAA met your initial expectations?

## **Appendix C: In-depth Interview Questions for the UAA Administration**

(Timeline: approximately 30 minutes)

### Overall situation with IS:

- How would you describe the situation with international students (IS) at the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA)?
- Do you think it has changed over the period of the past five years?
- How do you explain it? Do you see the pattern?

### RFE IS:

- Russian Far East (RFE) IS. What can you tell about this specific group of students?
- How does UAA recruit its IS? Specifically, students from the RFE.
- In your view, what are the common pitfalls for IS? How does the UAA administration address these obstacles?
- Do you think motivations, needs, and challenges of IS are different depending on a country of origin? If yes, what are the most common obstacles for IS from the RFE?

### Support for IS:

- Does UAA have any special programs to assist IS?
- Does UAA communicate with IS' home universities?
- How would you evaluate the success of the UAA support to IS?
- In your view, what aspects of international education should be improved at UAA?

## Appendix D: IRB Approval

IRB APPROVED: November 11, 2019

IRB ID: 1497048-1



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### Institutional Review Board

909 N Koyukuk Dr. Suite 212, P.O. Box 757270, Fairbanks, Alaska 99775-7270

November 11, 2019

To: Maureen Hogan, Ph.D.  
Principal Investigator  
From: University of Alaska Fairbanks IRB  
Re: [1497048-1] Aspirations, Motivations and Needs of Russian Far East Students at the University of Alaska Anchorage

Thank you for submitting the New Project referenced below. The submission was handled by Exempt Review. The Office of Research Integrity has determined that the proposed research qualifies for exemption from the requirements of 45 CFR 46. This exemption does not waive the researchers' responsibility to adhere to basic ethical principles for the responsible conduct of research and discipline specific professional standards.

Title:	Aspirations, Motivations and Needs of Russian Far East Students at the University of Alaska Anchorage
Received:	October 28, 2019
Exemption Category:	2
Effective Date:	November 11, 2019

This action is included on the December 4, 2019 IRB Agenda.

*Prior to making substantive changes to the scope of research, research tools, or personnel involved on the project, please contact the Office of Research Integrity to determine whether or not additional review is required. Additional review is not required for small editorial changes to improve the clarity or readability of the research tools or other documents.*

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